

**The Leavis-Bateson Debate:  
A Study of Condition, Implication, Propensity,  
and Bad-Faith.**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of the twentieth-century debate between F.R. Leavis and F.W. Bateson. In it I explore the critical positions held by Leavis and Bateson in relation to the function of criticism and the role of the critic. The epistemological inquiry central to my analysis asks: is literary criticism and the study of *literature* antithetical to the construct of a *discipline*, which by definition presupposes objective standards and criteria. My research concludes that the views contested throughout the Leavis-Bateson debate stem from pre-conceived and implicit notions regarding what Leavis and Bateson deem literary art ought to be. As such, their *methodological principles* and *critical ideologies* can be seen as practical extensions of subjective values. In the later sections of the thesis I examine the key issues of the debate in relation to wider critical discourse in which the principles of literary evaluation are subject to applied autotelic and meta-critical analysis. I conclude my work with the assertion that due to the inherency of subjectivism in processes of critical performance, the systematic application of determinable validity to critical methods or judgments within fields and disciplines of knowledge, occurs not through deference to verifiable domains of aesthetic or nomothetic truth, but rather through functions of power, position, and bad faith.

## **Dedication**

**I dedicate this thesis, with a heartfelt thank you, to Reji and Cathy Thanangadan. For their unconditional support and kindness, and for a period of my life that I will always remember with great appreciation, — and quite simply, without whom the following work, and much else, would not have been possible.**

## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge Professor Ian Small at the University of Birmingham for supervising the writing of this thesis. His patience in guiding my efforts, as well as his knowledge and expertise in the area of the following study has been influential and greatly appreciated. I have also received kind help and support from other staff members and students at the Faculty of English, as well as the Main Library at the University of Birmingham. I would like to acknowledge the work of the writer Paul de Man (1919-1983) particularly the collection of his essays entitled *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*. My reading of Paul de Man's literary criticism and philosophy has undoubtedly provided the following work with a higher level of knowledge and understanding in relation to the issues it explores. I also wish to acknowledge the writer Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936) particularly for his work *The Tragic Sense of Life*. My reading of Unamuno's *The Tragic Sense of Life* has provided me with knowledge and ideas, and I am deeply grateful to have encountered his writing during my time. My final acknowledgement of appreciation is for the pivotal support of my friends and family.

## **Forms of Reference: Abbreviations and Citation Notes**

1. Notes on primary sources
2. Notes on abbreviations.
3. Notes on footnotes.

### **1. NOTES ON PRIMARY SOURCES**

The focus of this thesis is the Leavis-Bateson debate which comprised two sets of exchanges. The first set, in 1935, and the second, in 1953.

#### 1935

The structure of the first phase (1935) comprised, in total, three correspondences all of which were originally published in *Scrutiny: A Quarterly Review*. Original publication information is detailed in brackets.

- |                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| (1) Leavis, 'A Review',   | (Vol. IV. No. 1, June, 1935. pp.96-100)        |
| (2) Bateson, 'A Reply',   | (Vol. IV. No. 2, September, 1935. pp.181-185)  |
| (3) Leavis, 'A Rejoinder, | (Vol. IV. No. 2, September, 1935. pp. 185-187) |

All three of the above correspondences have been reprinted since in various publications. Some of which are used by secondary sources throughout the thesis. These subsequent publications include:

Eric Bentley (ed.), 1948. *The Importance of Scrutiny: Selections from Scrutiny: A Quarterly Review, 1932-1948*, (New York: G.W. Stewart)

F.R. Leavis (ed.), 1968. *A Selection from Scrutiny compiled by F.R. Leavis in Two Volumes*, Vol.1, (Cambridge: CUP)

All textual references and quotations from the debate (exchanges of 1935) in this thesis are sourced from:

F.R. Leavis (ed.), 2008. *Scrutiny: A Quarterly Review: IV 1935-1936*, (Cambridge: CUP)

#### 1953

The structure of the second phase (1953) comprised, in total, three correspondences all of which were originally published in *Scrutiny: A Quarterly Review*. Original publication information is detailed in brackets.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| (1) Leavis, 'The Responsible Critic or<br>The Function of Criticism at Anytime', | (Vol. XIX. No. 3, Spring, 1953. pp.162-184)  |
| (2) Bateson, 'The Responsible Critic',   | (Vol. XIX. No. 4, October, 1953. pp.317-321) |
| (3) Leavis, 'A Rejoinder,  | (Vol. XIX. No. 4, October, 1953. pp.321-328) |

All three of the above correspondences have been reprinted since in various publications. Some of which are used by secondary sources throughout the thesis. The subsequent publications include:

F.R. Leavis (ed.), 1968. *A Selection from Scrutiny compiled by F.R. Leavis in Two Volumes*, Vol.2, (Cambridge: CUP)

All textual references and quotations from the debate (exchanges of 1953) in this thesis are sourced from:

F.R. Leavis (ed.), 2008. *Scrutiny: A Quarterly Review: XIX 1952-1953*, (Cambridge: CUP)

## 2. NOTES ON ABBREVIATIONS

Throughout the thesis, and in each chapter, all texts, both primary and secondary are titled and referenced in full: (Author/(Editor)/Title/(Journal)/Edition/Place of publication/Publisher). However, in the case of the following primary texts, subsequent mentions and citations are abbreviated as follows:

Leavis, 'A Review',	June, 1935:	<b>A Review</b>
Bateson, 'A Reply',	September, 1935:	<b>A Reply</b>
Leavis, 'A Rejoinder',	September, 1935:	<b>A Rejoinder</b>
Leavis, 'The Responsible Critic or The Function of Criticism at Anytime',	Spring, 1953:	<b>Anytime</b>
Bateson, 'The Responsible Critic',	October, 1953:	<b>Anytime Reply</b>
Leavis, 'A Rejoinder',	October, 1953:	<b>Anytime Rejoinder</b>

Other texts which are abbreviated in all cases asides from first mention in each chapter are:

F.R. Leavis, 1932. *New Bearings in English Poetry: A Study of the Contemporary Situation*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin in assoc. with Chatto & Windus): ***New Bearings***

F.W. Bateson, 1934. *English Poetry and the English Language: An Experiment in Literary History*, (Oxford: Clarendon): ***E.P.E.L.***

F.W. Bateson, 1953, 'The Responsible Critic at the Present Time', *Essays in Criticism*, Vol. III, No.1, January, pp. 1-27: **Present Time**

F.W. Bateson, 1972. *Essays in Critical Dissent*, (London: Longman) ***E.I.C.D.***

## 2. NOTES ON FOOTNOTES

I have used footnotes (*fn.*) throughout the thesis to cite the source of quotations, *memoria technical*, and necessary elaboration where information is unsuitable within main body of text. Any subsequent sourcing of the same text *and* the same page as that referenced directly above is noted as *ibid.* If the text remains the same, but the reference is from a different page, then it is *ibid.*, (followed by the relevant page number).

Footnotes for each chapter begin at *fn.1*.

In all circumstances where a secondary source quotes either Leavis or Bateson I will supply the original location of the citation to which they are referring by stating: writer (X) quotes (and information in full of original text, unabbreviated). In all cases where Leavis quotes Bateson, or Bateson quotes Leavis, I will also provide the original location of the citation to which they are referring, except in chapters 2 and 3. In chapters 2 and 3 all cases where Leavis quotes Bateson, or Bateson quotes Leavis are directly cited from the corresponding exchanges in the same year unless indicated otherwise.

In conjunction with University of Birmingham's style-sheet all citations within the thesis (in the footnotes and the works cited section) will be presented in the Harvard style. Author/s (or Editor/s),

Year of publication, Essay/Article/Title, (if not independent—journal name), (if not independent—Journal information), (ed.) (if not the Author/s), Place of publication: Publisher). If in footnotes, p. (page no./ page no.s if continuous indicated by (-)



# THE LEAVIS-BATESON DEBATE:

A Study of Condition, Implication, Propensity, and Bad Faith.

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## INTRODUCTION

Long before the epistemological inquiries of Kant and Schopenhauer, the Latin maxim *de gustibus non est disputandum* laconically expressed the sentiment that there is no point of disputing matters of taste. The basis of such an admonition, when applied to literature, can be seen in various anti-positivist claims even today, that the justification of literary studies as a discipline of knowledge is threatened due to the inherently subjective nature of the critical act. Though this may be true—for the critical act is, by its etymological definition, an act of judgement—the limitation of such a claim is that it assumes literary studies to *mean* criticism, and criticism therefore, to be synonymous with what is meant, when someone speaks of literary studies. While the term and function of ‘criticism’ has been ‘scrutinized to the point of reflecting on its own origin’<sup>1</sup> in the hermeneutic philosophy of Schleiermacher, the aesthetic theory of Husserl, and more recently, in the post-structuralism of Paul de Man, it is worth noting that criticism is, in effect, only one of several ways in which literature has been approached as a field of study throughout history. Patricia Waugh presents an understanding of criticism by stating that it is ‘one associated with ‘judgement’ and ‘taste’ rather than knowledge and scholarship.’<sup>2</sup> Waugh distinguishes criticism from ‘scholarship’ on the basis that the latter harbours a more stable association with fact, knowledge, and truth, and therefore, assumes a paradigm of normative function more conducive to authority. If authority—a basis from which to assert measures of validity within practice—can be said, in turn, to legitimise the study of literature as an academic or professional discipline, then it would appear, given the empirical impasse of criticism, that scholarship holds a stronger and more nomothetically beneficial claim as the approach and method of preference.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul de Man, 1983. *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge) p.8.

<sup>2</sup> Patricia Waugh (ed.), 2006. *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide*, (Oxford: OUP) p.29.

Certainly, this was the belief of the Oxford scholar F.W. Bateson when in 1934 he published a thesis entitled *English Poetry and the English Language*. Bateson's thesis, however, was to come under severe attack in the Cambridge quarterly *Scrutiny*, in a review written by the journal's founder and editor, the academic and literary critic, F.R. Leavis. What followed was a series of exchanges, in two phases, in which the study of literature itself, its principles, as well as the role and responsibility of the critic, became subject to a conflict of competing literary-ideological values. Indeed, within the debate Leavis and Bateson respectively argued that certain methods and approaches to analysing literary work were not only preferable over others, but necessary to standards, if criticism was to remain a serious and justifiable discipline of intellectual pursuit. The debate's contention deepened, however, not only with regards to how particular standards could be realised in practice, but more fundamentally, with regards to what those standards and critical objectives in themselves should be.

Whilst in an autotelic sense, the dispute between Leavis and Bateson centred on how literary works and their writers should be evaluated, the conflict and antithesis of their discourse reflected a wider, academic, cultural, and traditional rivalry between their institutions, the University of Cambridge, and the University of Oxford. While neither Leavis nor Bateson had harmonious relations with their respective universities, Leavis, who founded the *Scrutiny* journal at Cambridge in 1932, had significant associations with the emerging formalist methods of practical criticism, that under the guidance of I.A. Richards, and later, E.M.W. Tillyard, had become the prominent mode of literary evaluation within the school's English Faculty. The Oxford and Harvard educated Bateson, who later founded *Essays in Criticism* specifically to exhibit the balance and scholarship absent, as he deemed, it in Leavis's *Scrutiny*, thus represented not only scholarship in its 'antithesis' to criticism, but the literary approach of the rival faculty, in the rival university. These factors of representative

and polarising association and ideology would characterise the debate as a significant battle on several grounds relating to the practice and cultural context of British literary studies in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>3</sup>

The central purpose of this thesis is to examine what can be learnt from the debate in terms of how the study of literature exists as an academic discipline, and more broadly, as a field of knowledge. In analysing the conflict between Leavis and Bateson, my aim is to identify the crux of their contention, and to assess the degree to which their differences can be seen to stem from a discrepancy of pre-conceived and implicit beliefs regarding literary art and the ways it is studied. In this sense, the emphasis of investigation centres on the nature of literary 'values' in both criticism and scholarship, and the significance and implication of those values in relation to principles and assumptions surrounding disciplinary standards, methodology, criteria, and ultimately, the judgement of literary art. Exploring the conflicting ideology presented within the debate, my analysis will also examine the degree to which the contentions between Leavis and Bateson can be evidenced as symptomatic of wider disputes within literary-critical discourse. Indeed while the Leavis-Bateson debate is important in terms of what it uniquely reflects, that being, the values, associations, and idiosyncrasies particular to its two participants, there is also significance to be observed in the similarities the debate shares with various other critical debates in the twentieth century. This assertion I base on the view that if the same critical issues dividing Leavis and Bateson can be perceived within other debates, then the recurrence of underlying dichotomies (such as between value and truth, subjectivity and objectivity, and opinion and knowledge) may in fact be inherent to the nature of criticism and the study of literature.

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<sup>3</sup> For an insightful account of British literary studies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (particularly in relation to Cambridge and Oxford) see Terry Eagleton's chapter 'The Rise of English' in Terry Eagleton, 1983. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, (Oxford: Blackwell).

When surveying what has already been said about the debate, there are several commentaries that provide a useful overview, in which the main issues of contention emerge as evident in both a critical and cultural context. In his essay 'The Literary Theories of F.W. Bateson' (1979) René Wellek states that the debate gave Bateson an opportunity to assert a distinction 'between two types of propositions, one literary historical which says that 'A derives from B' and one critical which can be reduced to 'A is better than B' or even just 'A is good'.<sup>4</sup> According to Wellek, Bateson's argument was that the literary critic, in viewing a literary work as an autonomous 'artifact'<sup>5</sup> evaluates it as if it was merely 'a structure existing in space'.<sup>6</sup> The effect of this was that the purely critical approach disconnected literature from its historical and social context, and thus, from a true understanding of its meaning, significance and value. By distinction, Bateson argued, the scholar sought to explore literary history in a social and cultural context in order to identify literary trends, themes, styles, linguistic patterns, and so forth, so as to be able to situate, understand, and accordingly value literary work in the wider context of the English literary tradition. In a later untitled essay Wellek states that the contention arises within the debate due to Leavis's 'rejection'<sup>7</sup> of Bateson's 'social explanation'<sup>8</sup> for understanding literature. In 'Scholar, Critic, and Scholar-Critic' (1979) Valentine Cunningham offers the view that Bateson's principal agenda was to demonstrate how a sense of 'contextual fact was vital to a reading of literary texts'<sup>9</sup> and 'how critical 'judgment' depended on 'knowledge'.<sup>10</sup> The issue, as Cunningham sees it, was that

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<sup>4</sup> René Wellek, 1979. 'The Literary Theories of F.W. Bateson'. *Essays in Criticism*, XXIX, 2, 112-123. p.116.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 120. R. Wellek is quoting F.W. Bateson, 2008. 'A Reply', *Scrutiny: A Quarterly Review: IV 1935-1936*, (Cambridge: CUP). p.181.

<sup>6</sup> Wellek, 'The Literary Theories of F.W. Bateson', p.120.

<sup>7</sup> René Wellek, 1981. [untitled]. *Modern Language Review*, 76, 1, 175-180. p.177. Although untitled, Wellek's contribution was listed as a three-part review of: *F.R. Leavis: Judgment and the Discipline of Thought* by Robert Byars, 1978; *The Literary Criticism of F.R. Leavis*, by R.P. Bilan. 1979; and *The Moment of 'Scrutiny'* by Francis Mulhern, 1979.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Valentine Cunningham, 1979. 'F.W. Bateson: Scholar, Critic, and Scholar-Critic.' *Essays in Criticism*, XXIX, 2, 139-155. p.141

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

Leavis did not agree that scholarship could provide the “sense of fact”<sup>11</sup> that Bateson supposed it could. The consequence of this being that void of the ‘objectivity’ Bateson assumed it to engender, scholarship was, in essence, a performance of value-based critical assumptions about history and social context. Bateson’s failing in this sense, Leavis argued, was not only that his ‘factual’ literary history was equally as subjective as criticism, but that it re-directed its critical focus away from what was important—the text—the literary art itself.

Four years prior to Cunningham’s essay, Quentin Skinner wrote an article entitled ‘Hermeneutics and the Role of History’ (1975). Within it, Skinner states that the ‘classic’<sup>12</sup> debate between Bateson and Leavis centrally involved a disagreement ‘over what Bateson called “the discipline of contextual reading.”’<sup>13</sup> In a similar sense to Cunningham, Skinner notes that Leavis’s rejection of Bateson’s argument centred on the view that ‘to reconstruct a postulated “social context”’<sup>14</sup> ‘was gratuitous’<sup>15</sup> and that in most cases ‘the text, duly pondered, will yield its meaning and value to an adequate intelligence and sensibility.’<sup>16</sup> An important stress rests on the word ‘postulated’. Indeed, for the idea that Leavis’s rejection of

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Quentin Skinner, 1975. ‘Hermeneutics and the Role of History.’ *New Literary History*, 7, 1, 209-232. p.215.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, Q. Skinner quoting F.W. Bateson, 1953, ‘The Function of Criticism at the Present Time’, *Essays in Criticism*, III, 1, 1-27. p.19 It is important to note that by ‘contextual’ reading and criticism, Skinner refers to the type whereby information from beyond the page (the ‘context’ ) is consulted or considered as part of the evaluative process. Though it is difficult to measure precisely degrees to which such extrinsic factors influence or factor into a particular reading, what can be said for certain, is that such a method is clearly distinct from particular critical approaches whereby it is specifically maintained that such extrinsic factors are not to be consulted. I raise this here in order to clarify, in these general terms, what I, Skinner, and my other sources, mean by ‘contextual criticism’. The reason being that there has been some confusion with regards to use of this term. In J.A. Cuddon’s *Literary Terms and Literary Theory* ‘contextual criticism’ is defined as precisely the opposite, that being, the critical method that does *not* consider, factor, or explore information from beyond the text. The definition reads as follows: ‘Contextual Criticism: A mode of critical analysis of a literary text characteristic of the New Criticism (*q.v.*), especially as practised by Murray Krieger and Eliseo Vivas. Krieger discusses the method in *The New Apologists for Poetry* (1956) and *Theory of Criticism* (1976). He describes contextualism as the claim “that a poem is a tight, compelling, finally closed context” and suggests that it is necessary to analyse and judge such a work as an ‘aesthetic object’ without reference to anything outside or beyond it. There is an obvious connection here with Jacques Derrida’s dictum that ‘there is nothing outside the text’. The emphasis on close reading in contextual theory has had considerable influence of critical methods.’ J.A. Cuddon (ed.), 1999. *Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn. (London: Penguin) p.177. Whilst from a certain semantic perspective Cuddon’s definition may be equally as valid, it is a particularly rare inversion of the more commonly associated opposite definition whereby contextual criticism means the criticism that considers a text’s surrounding and extrinsic context.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, Q. Skinner quoting F.R. Leavis, 1968, ‘The Responsible Critic or the Function of Criticism at any Time’, rpt. in *A Selection from Scrutiny*, (ed.) F.R. Leavis. (Cambridge: CUP) p.11.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, Q. Skinner quoting F.R. Leavis, *ibid.*, p.281.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, Q. Skinner quoting F. R. Leavis, *ibid.*, p.292.

Bateson's programme meant that Leavis felt context itself to be gratuitous or of no value, is one that Michael Bell, along with several other Leavisian scholars, consider misleading. Bell writes that the debate showed 'not that Leavis objected to seeing literature in context, but that he saw great literature as the overwhelming, almost self-sufficient, evidence *of the context*',<sup>17</sup> adding that, 'so far as context matters', Leavis felt that it existed 'in the work, and the language, itself.'<sup>18</sup> Viewing the debate, like Skinner, as a 'classic' discourse in 'intellectual history',<sup>19</sup> Donald R. Kelley provides that, in essence, it constituted as clash between 'the "Responsible Critic" from Cambridge'<sup>20</sup> and the literary historian from Oxford, with the latter 'posing as the champion of scholarship'.<sup>21</sup> Kelley highlights that, for Leavis, 'the idea of placing a poem back into "total context" was nonsense and "social context" was an illusion arising involuntarily "out of one's personal living" situated in the twentieth century'.<sup>22</sup> For Kelley, Leavis's argument entailed that 'in any case "social" was an invidious term which should not contaminate the high art of Literature, and such pretensions to scholarship suggested an inability to read poetry and to make the sort of intuitive aesthetic judgments that were the office of the critic.'<sup>23</sup>

Gary Day in *Re-reading Leavis* (1996) offers several pages of analysis on the debate, as does R.P. Bilan in *The Literary Criticism of F.R. Leavis* (1979). Day proposes that the debate can be understood as a disagreement over whether poetry 'can be understood independently of the social-context in which it was produced'.<sup>24</sup> Bilan provides a similar assessment in stating that the debate offered a platform for Leavis to emphasise that he did

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<sup>17</sup> Michael Bell, 1997, 'The Afterlife of F.R. Leavis: Dead but won't Lie Down', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, XXVI, 2, 196-199.p. 199.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Donald R. Kelley, 1995. 'Intellectual History in a Global Age', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 66, 2, 155-167. p.155.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p.161.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.* p. 162. D.R. Kelley quoting F.R. Leavis, 1967. *Anna Karenina and other essays*, (London: Chatto & Windus) p. 195

<sup>24</sup> Gary Day, 1996. *Re-reading Leavis: Culture and Literary Criticism*, (London: MacMillan) p.143.

not think consideration of a work's social context was in anyway distinct or separable from the necessary task of the literary critic, and so from literary criticism. Tae Chul Kim, in an essay entitled: 'F.R. Leavis, or the Function of Criticism under Specialist Modernity' (2004), highlights Leavis's belief that 'the further and wider one goes to reconstruct the original historical setting "from his reading in the period, the more it is *his* construction (insofar as he produces anything more than a mass of heterogeneous information alleged to be relevant)."'<sup>25</sup>

For Kim, Leavis's argument reflected the 'present-centredness'<sup>26</sup> of his criticism:

The reason for Leavis's challenge to Bateson's project is that it may possibly mislead the living reader to pursue the dead contextual meaning and to ignore the living significance which a given literary text assumes at the present time. It is not in its historical context that Leavis, unlike Bateson, is intended to embody the Arnoldian spirit 'to see the object as in itself it really is', but instead here and now at the 'present' moment. Leavis is convinced that 'only out of the living present is there any access to the past,' because 'the historical imagination makes the past contemporary'.<sup>27</sup>

The antithesis between Leavis and Bateson becomes further apparent when Kim's account of Leavis's position is examined in line with the reflection on Bateson's stance offered by Graham Martin:

All poems, Bateson insisted, were intended as rational communications between their writers and their original readership. The job of 'the responsible critic' was to provide the modern reader with the historical information about the intellectual, cultural, and socio-political assumptions which made up the world of a poem's writer and first readers, lacking which no full interpretation of its meaning was possible. Bateson went so far as to insist that for each poem a 'right reading' could be discovered, though only with help of such exceptionally detailed historical knowledge. The critics he was faulting had read the poems as if they were of *our* time, a procedure which – whether from ignorance or indifference – amounted to a denial of their existence as historical documents. Hence their failure in critical 'responsibility'.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Tae Chul Kim, 2004. 'F.R. Leavis, or the Function of Criticism under Specialist Modernity', *Journal of British and American Studies*, 10, 1, 81-112. p.103. Kim incorrectly cites the Leavis quote as from *Valuation in Criticism*; the quote is accurate, however, it is from F.R. Leavis, 1968, 'The Responsible Critic or the Function of Criticism at any Time', rpt. in *A Selection from Scrutiny*, 2, (ed.) F.R. Leavis. (Cambridge: CUP) p. 293.

<sup>26</sup> Kim, p.107.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.105. T.C. Kim is quoting F. R. Leavis, 1986. *Valuation in Criticism and Other Essays* (ed.) G. Singh. (Cambridge: CUP) p.121.

<sup>28</sup> Graham Martin, 1996. 'F.R. Leavis and the Function of Criticism', *Essays in Criticism*, XLVI, 1, 1-15. p.12.



The contention therefore, in Martin's view, developed as the wave of Bateson's historicist ideology crashed against what, in Leavis's criticism, was a focus upon contemporary life and values. For Martin, Leavis's central position entailed that 'past literature should be selectively evaluated for its critical bearing upon twentieth-century civilisation'.<sup>29</sup> Bateson's on the other hand was, as highlighted above, that of the contrary notion, that past literature 'could be seriously read only for what it told us about the past'.<sup>30</sup>

Richard Storer's study *Leavis* (2009) provides a lucid overview of the debate and the central differences between Leavis's and Bateson's approaches to literary evaluation. For Storer, these differences become apparent within the debate in the assessments made by Leavis and Bateson of the poetry of Andrew Marvell and Alexander Pope. Bateson viewed Leavis's reading of the poems as encumbered, and even irresponsible, in the sense that they were not sufficiently knowledgeable about information surrounding the poems' external social and linguistic contexts. Storer highlights that Leavis was 'scornful'<sup>31</sup> of this, and that he believed in the obverse; that being, 'that we can only know context through text'—because the text is something 'determinate – something indubitably *there*'.<sup>32</sup> Storer, though he discusses the conflict relatively briefly, nevertheless pin-points the debate's autotelic significance in asserting that the nature of its dispute constituted an epistemological challenge to traditional assumptions regarding literary analysis and criticism as a discipline of study. Another analysis of the debate from the perspective of its theoretical implications on the type of knowledge that can be said to exist in a literary discipline is Josephine Guy and Ian Small's *Politics and Value* (1993). According to Guy and Small the central issue of the debate can be seen in the fact that Bateson believed literary judgments could be made more 'rigorous, by a greater attention to scholarship, by which he meant 'factual' knowledge about

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Storer, 2009. *F.R. Leavis*, (London: Routledge) p.93.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, R.Storer is quoting F.R. Leavis, 1953, 'Correspondence: The Responsible Critic', *Scrutiny*, 19, 4, 321-328.p.325.

the ‘social-context’ of literary works’.<sup>33</sup> Guy and Small present the view that Bateson ‘was not trying to eliminate value-judgments from the discipline; rather he was simply trying to make them more ‘objective’, and by implication, more authoritative. He wanted, that is, to provide a criterion by which literary-judgments could be deemed right or wrong’.<sup>34</sup>

It is somewhere then, between Storer’s perception of the debate’s epistemological implications, and Guy and Small’s focus on whether critical judgements can be validated as ‘right or wrong’, that the inquiry of this work will aim to offer a modest contribution. To this effect I note that there are limitations in the size of the work I am permitted to present. One of the consequences of this may be evident in the slightly lesser emphasis I give to the broader issue of British academic ‘class-consciousness’ that may be said to have affected or influenced aspects of animosity between Leavis and Bateson. While it will be seen from the beginning that I make no attempt to separate Leavis and Bateson, as men, from their ideology, or literary theory from relevant socio-cultural contexts, it is from *within* the debate itself that I aim to identify such contexts, and (without, I hope, begging the question) present them, accordingly, as they contribute to an understanding of it. It is however, the epistemological status of literary studies that principally concerns this thesis, and as such, my inquiry, in all its contexts, aims to mobilise the debate in order to assess whether the competing beliefs held by Leavis and Bateson regarding literary analysis stem, not from deference to determinable ‘truth’, but rather from a subjective domain of ideological and aesthetic literary values.

In terms of the thesis’s structure, I have divided it into five chapters. I examine the debate in a chronological manner in order to reflect the evolution and development that can be seen to emerge within the topics and focuses of the dispute. The first chapter I have entitled: ‘The Emergence of the Leavis-Bateson Debate: Pre-1935. In this chapter I note that

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<sup>33</sup> Josephine Guy, and Ian Small, 1993. *Politics and Value in English Studies: A Discipline in Crisis?*, (Cambridge: CUP) p.73.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*

the theoretical consideration of the critical act that occurred between Leavis and Bateson can be attributed to an impending sense of ‘*impasse*’<sup>35</sup> and loss of ‘bearings’<sup>36</sup> they respectively felt in the ‘contemporary situation’<sup>37</sup> of literary studies in the 1920s and early 1930s. I trace their early positions as they can be seen to relate to other methods and approaches within the period. I also present a consideration of the debate’s emergence in light of the personal and ideological relationships Leavis and Bateson held with their respective universities, and I assess the major work they published in the years just prior to the clash, particularly Leavis’s *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932) and Bateson’s *English Poetry and the English Language* (1934). I also look at Leavis’s principal hand in the founding and editorial doctrine of *Scrutiny* as well as the journal’s critical significance, not only as the quarterly that hosted the debate, but as the quarterly conceived upon the very critical principles that were to be contested by Leavis and Bateson within their first exchanges of 1935. In presenting these issues of context in chapter 1 my aim is to establish an understanding of the background and the literary-ideological values held by Leavis and Bateson in the run-up to the debate, and furthermore to assess the argument that their critical and ideological attitudes at this time, made it inevitable, that if such a discourse of exchange was to occur, that it would be severe and ideologically hostile.

The exchanges then that did occur in 1935 constitute the focus of my second chapter. The debate began, as mentioned, when Leavis published a review of Bateson’s thesis *E.P.E.L.* in *Scrutiny*’s June issue. The review, Bateson would later state, ‘was the most unfavourable the book received.’<sup>38</sup> Bateson, both ‘disappointed’<sup>39</sup> and ‘angry’<sup>40</sup> that Leavis

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<sup>35</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1934. *English Poetry and the English Language: An Experiment in Literary History*, (Oxford: Clarendon) p.vi. Bateson’s italics.

<sup>36</sup> F.R. Leavis, 1932. *New Bearings in English Poetry: A Study of the Contemporary Situation*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin in assoc. with Chatto & Windus) term of title.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, term of subtitle.

<sup>38</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1978. ‘F.R.L. and *E* in *C*: A Retrospect’, *Essays in Criticism*, XXVIII, 4, 353-361.p.355.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1964. ‘Alternative to *Scrutiny*, *Essays in Criticism*, XIV, 1, 10-20. p.13.

failed to respond positively to his ‘honest attempt . . . to apply the methods of scholarship to the *avant-garde* literary values of English poetry’,<sup>41</sup> in turn wrote a carefully written response re-stating the position of his thesis in the hope that Leavis, with a better understanding of it, would identify the validity of its argument. Leavis’s rejoinder, however, whilst ‘less astringent’<sup>42</sup> than his initial review, nevertheless, did not budge ‘one inch’<sup>43</sup> in terms of its objection. I examine the dialectic form of the exchanges as a contiguous series of proposition and refutation which provided the peer-public readership<sup>44</sup> of *Scrutiny* a comparative understanding of how Leavis and Bateson perceived ‘the rôles of literary criticism and literary history.’<sup>45</sup> I finally examine Leavis’s argument in its relation to wider claims in literary theory that value judgement must centre on the internal analysis of structure and language.

The 1953 exchanges are the focus of the chapter 3. To view the debate as one debate of two parts, as opposed to two separate debates, is to acknowledge the sense of continuity in which the exchanges of 1953 can be seen to constitute a development of the issues central to the exchanges eighteen years earlier. In this chapter I provide analysis of the text that was to provoke Leavis on this occasion, Bateson’s long essay: ‘The Function of Criticism at the Present Time’. Leavis’s attack on Bateson in this year was arguably even less surprising that that the attack in 1935. This is because in Bateson’s new essay Leavis was explicitly named amongst a group of critics subject to a series of severe critical charges. These charges, most of which stemmed, as Bateson saw it, from a failure to attend to extrinsic context in evaluation, resulted in claims of evasion of ‘social-duty’,<sup>46</sup> ‘abuse of social-function’,<sup>47</sup> and a

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<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Despite the relatively low print *Scrutiny* was widely read amongst an influential readership in the schools and in the universities. ‘With subscriptions coming in from T.S. Eliot, George Santayana, R.H. Tawney and Aldous Huxley.’ MacKillop. 1995. *F.R. Leavis: A Life in Criticism*. p.45

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1953, ‘The Function of Criticism at the Present Time’, *Essays in Criticism*, III, 1, 1-27.p.3

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*

‘critical irresponsibility’<sup>48</sup> that was both ‘reckless’<sup>49</sup> and ‘insidious’.<sup>50</sup> Though these accusations may well have been enough to incense Leavis, I also look at how the wider motive of Bateson’s essay would have constituted an even further provocation in that it represented a declaration of the critical values to be central to the rival journal *Essays in Criticism*. In the ensuing battle of 1953, Leavis and Bateson would confront each other regarding excerpts from Marvell and Pope, in which a demonstration of their conflicting evaluative styles can be seen in action. I seek to identify parallels between these styles and various principles of approach established throughout the twentieth century in the positivist schools of Russian Formalism, the Cambridge elevation of Practical Criticism, and in the emergence of the Anglo-American New Criticism.

Leavis and Bateson of course also published works that, although not directly intended as continuations of the debate’s dialogue, nevertheless can be seen to develop and define their positions with regards to the issues of contest within it. Indeed, the boundaries between their exchanges and their respective wider work cannot be separated in that the debate became a regular point of reference, most notably in Bateson’s subsequent writing, after the exchanges and up until 1978.<sup>51</sup> In this period Bateson himself would state that as he ‘read and re-read’<sup>52</sup> the exchanges it had become clear that not only was Leavis ‘right’,<sup>53</sup> but that the ‘force’<sup>54</sup> of his argument had since played a ‘crucial’<sup>55</sup> role in his own ‘literary education’.<sup>56</sup> Throughout chapter 4 I examine the nature of this concession, and furthermore, the degree to which Leavis’s victory can be seen to depend, in part, on a semantically nuanced expression of ontological values. With this in mind, I then explore the series of shifts

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<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Both Leavis and Bateson died in 1978, Leavis in April, and Bateson in October. Bateson, however, had written about the debate in his last published essay, ‘F.R.L. And E in C: A Retrospect’. See *fn*<sup>38</sup>.

<sup>52</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1964. ‘Alternative to *Scrutiny*’. p.12.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*

in Bateson's position, and particularly the degree to which Leavis's 'force' within the debate can be said to have influenced an almost entire U-turn in Bateson's critical pursuit of objectivity by the end of his career.

My aim in chapter 5 is to demonstrate that both criticism and scholarship, as they are presented by Leavis and Bateson, engender three subsidiary issues of methodological and aesthetic debate: that of the use of extrinsic and contextual information in critical assessment, the availability and value of authorial intention, and the evaluative distinction between a present-centric analysis of literature versus an assessment with emphasis on the original, social, and historical contexts of a work's composition. I examine the similarity the debate shares with several critical discourses in which these issues constitute a point of theoretical impasse. In doing so, I will attempt to situate the debate in relation to the wider evolution of theoretical and critical philosophy in Europe and the United States. In exploring the methodological and ideological conflicts in all these debates as stemming from subjective literary values, I then examine the extent to which it may be said that a definite or *a posteriori* truth of literary approach akin the type of universal certitude present in scientific methods, appears inherently void from the type of knowledge that can be associated with responses or judgements upon the merit or value of literary art.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> By this I refer to the question of whether the nature of, say, a mathematic equation, for example that  $2 + 2 = 4$ , holds a different order of determinable 'truth' than literary-critical assumptions whereby, say, if Matthew Arnold's critical ideology was to find formula, might read: 'assessing what a writer is trying to do' + 'assessing how well he succeeds in doing it' + 'assessing whether the work exhibits 'high seriousness'' = the criterion for good criticism. See William S. Burroughs, 1985. *The Adding Machine*, (London: Calder) p.192. While it would seem unlikely (or perhaps not possible) that someone would challenge the law of a mathematical equation, the 'law' however of assessing whether a work exhibits 'high seriousness' may be challenged by a critic who might believe that in order for a literary work to be, say, good, it should *not* exhibit high seriousness. Irrespective of the degree to which such a criterion may appear unusual or hypothetical, if it *were* held by a critic, on what basis could its justification as a critical criterion be dismissed? As such it may be argued, that the mathematic equation that  $2+2=4$  possesses a type of epistemological certitude that does not exist in equal measure in a critical judgement that, for example, Shakespeare's work is 'better' than a tabloid glamour model's autobiography. If it is not possible to confirm in nomothetic or 'definite' terms that Arnold's criterion of 'high seriousness' constitutes an irrefutable universal aesthetic truth, then it would be no less valid for a critic to hold belief that a good work of literature should demonstrate, for example, 'a close consideration of underwear, limousines, or plastic surgery', in which case a glamour model's autobiography may, with no less justification, be regarded as 'better' than the plays of Shakespeare. As my later sections (and particularly my conclusion) will demonstrate, once one begins to question the nature and justification of established, traditional, and isomorphic,

This investigation leads my thesis into its conclusion: a formulation of a theoretical model which I have titled ‘Condition, Implication, Propensity, and Bad Faith.’ The model examines the conflict between Leavis and Bateson in relation to epistemological problematics surrounding the application of literary studies to disciplinary fields of practice. The model itself comprises four parts, each representing a stage of a cycle that illustrates how responses to literature evolve in a phenomenological sense, and the ways in which such responses can be understood to exist in the epistemological domains of validity, fact, truth, and knowledge. The value of proposing the model is that I wish to present my analysis of the debate as significant in a universal sense, that is to say, as applicable to the general understanding of literary-critical discourse in which conflict can be evidenced as ultimately symptomatic of the same issues inherent in the debate between Leavis and Bateson.

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critical assumptions, the study of literature can become a very unstable territory especially when considered in relation to measures of truth, certainty, and knowledge. While the example of admonition provided in this footnote is useful in indicating to the reader what will become central to this particular study, such examples—which appear to turn critical assumption on its head—are endless in their potential to destabilise aesthetic and critical values. Finally, I should note, if this exposing of assumption seems ‘destructive’ in that its theoretical implications destabilise pre-conceived and implicit ideas about literary criticism, then Leavis and Bateson engage in dispute on the basis of a ‘constructive’ hope, as mentioned, of determining how criticism and approaches to literary study *can* become (in an epistemological sense) justifiable and legitimate as a methodological and intellectual function. The differences in tendency or motive, however, between construction and destruction (similar to the dichotomous connotations of positivism and anti-positivism) does not in itself, as I shall conclude, lead to a difference in outcome with regards to the nature of criticism and its relationship to domains of certifiable knowledge.

**CHAPTER ONE:****THE EMERGENCE OF THE LEAVIS-BATESON DEBATE: PRE-1935**

In order to provide an understanding of the Leavis-Bateson debate, I begin, in this first chapter, by presenting answers to the questions: why did the debate occur? And what factors and events led to it? The immediate point to be made on this note is that it arose from a climate of wider debate and contestation that had emerged in British literary academics in the 1920s. At Oxford in 1922, J.A. Middleton Murry's thesis *The Problem of Style* assumed an investigative mode of critical doubt, by asking: what is criticism? Can it be objective? What is the nature of critical judgement? And, is it in 'vain'<sup>1</sup> that criticism seeks, 'like the symbols of mathematics',<sup>2</sup> a certitude and self-reason for being? Both Leavis and Bateson were familiar with Murry's work and the fundamental questions that it raised.<sup>3</sup> They were also cognizant of what P.W. Musgrave termed as the 'substantial changes in method'<sup>4</sup> at Cambridge, which, in work of T.S. Eliot and I.A. Richards had seen new critical approaches

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<sup>1</sup> J. Middleton Murry, 1922. *The Problem of Style*, (Oxford: OUP) p.1.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> See P.W. Musgrave, 1973. 'Scrutiny and Education', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 21, 3, 253-276. p.253. Also, for an account of familiarity, it can be seen that Bateson quotes Murry's *The Problem of Style* throughout *English Poetry and the English Language*. p.12, 117. With regards to Leavis's relation to Murry, Chris Joyce writes 'Leavis admired [Murry's] *Aspects of Literature* (1920) and *The Problem of Style* (1922), where Murry compared Shakespeare and Milton to the latter's disadvantage. In Leavis's dealings with poetry - and with literature and culture more generally - the Shakespearean use of language was always a touchstone.' Chris Joyce. 2008. *Centre for Leavis Studies*. [Online] <http://mypages.surrey.ac.uk/eds1cj/f-r-leavis-life-and-work.htm>. [Accessed 04 March10]. Despite Joyce's statement in which suggests a degree of ideological affinity between Leavis and Murry, there have also been claims to the contrary. Lu Jiande notes that in his debut essay in *Scrutiny* 'The Literary Mind', Leavis exemplifies his 'ongoing concern with 'intelligence'. Jiande adds that because of Leavis's 'awareness of the inseparability of 'intelligence' and 'sensibility', and also a looseness in writing, Leavis at times used the two terms interchangeably and even indiscriminately. In the second half of the essay, for instance, in wielding and brandishing his sabres of 'intelligence' and 'sensibility' against those whom he couldn't agree with, Leavis reduced them to cheap verbal counters and dodges. John Middleton Murry was one of the victims, being 'almost incredibly defective in sensibility', and 'the defect of sensibility shows as a defect of intelligence'.' Lu Jiande, 2003. 'F.R. Leavis' *Journal of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences*, 53, May, 22-34. p.25. L. Jiande quotes F.R. Leavis, 1932. 'The Literary Mind', *Scrutiny*, I, I, 20-32. p.27.

<sup>4</sup> John Fekete, 1977. *The Critical Twilight: Explorations in the ideology of Anglo-American literary theory from Eliot to McLuhan*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul) p.3, 217.



emerging from what John Fekete terms as the critical consequence of ‘nineteenth-century problematics’<sup>5</sup> between certain dualities such as ‘culture’ and ‘civilisation’.<sup>6</sup>

Exploring this back-drop of concern and change throughout the chapter, I begin by stating that in the five year period prior to their first exchanges in 1935, both Leavis and Bateson had independently established proposals they felt could help correct some of the problems of methodological dispute in the study of literature, and more specifically, in their respective activities of criticism and scholarship. While it may be said, that to this extent, they shared an aim: to point out a direction for improving consistency and standards, the differences between them, however, emerged from the differences in what they respectively deemed the contemporary failings to be, and thus, by extension, the solutions they proposed as a means forwards.

The failing of contemporary criticism, as understood by Leavis, would form the focus of his first book: *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932). In the work, Leavis, then a thirty-six year old tutor at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, addressed what he termed in the subtitle as the ‘Contemporary Situation’,<sup>7</sup> one which he felt had emerged from a critical neglect of poetry in its relation to the modern world. Leavis’s principal admonition was that ‘if the poetry and the intelligence of the age lose touch with each other, poetry will cease to matter much, and the age will be lacking in finer awareness’.<sup>8</sup> By this, Leavis was speaking of something which he felt had already occurred, and his assessment that ‘very little of

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Dean, 1996. ‘The Last Critic? The Importance of F.R. Leavis’, *The New Criterion*, 14, 1, 28-35. p.31. Dean also states that ‘the debate concerning the relation of high to low culture, and the larger debate concerning the relation of culture to society was particularly vigorous in the early 1930s. While its roots can be traced back to the late eighteenth-century, as they are in Raymond Williams’s classic study, *Culture and Society*, the early 1930s saw the publication of several significant texts: F. R. Leavis’s *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* (1930), and, co-authored with Denys Thompson, his *Culture and Environment* (1933); Q. D. Leavis’s *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932); and the first issue of *Scrutiny*, which appeared in 1932.’ p.35.

<sup>7</sup> F.R. Leavis, 1932. *New Bearings in English Poetry: A Study of the Contemporary Situation*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin in assoc. with Chatto & Windus) term of subtitle.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p.17.

contemporary intelligence concerns itself with poetry’<sup>9</sup> would bring into focus a central engagement throughout *New Bearings* with why he felt this to be case. In his first chapter ‘Poetry and the Modern World’, Leavis would state that:

No one *could* be seriously interested in the great bulk of the verse that is culled and offered to us as the fine flower of modern poetry. For the most part it is not so much bad as dead – it was never alive. The words that lie there arranged on the page have no roots: the writer himself can never have been more than superficially interested in them. Even such genuine poetry as the anthologies of modern verse do contain is apt, by its kind and quality, to suggest that the present age does not favour the growth of poets. A study of the latter end of the *Oxford Book of Victorian Verse* leads to the conclusion that something has been wrong for forty or fifty years at the least.<sup>10</sup>

For Leavis the decline in critical standards had led to the promotion of a ‘dead’<sup>11</sup> and ‘superficial’<sup>12</sup> modern poetry. The effect of this, he felt, served to formulate a notion within the general reading public that poetry, particularly good poetry, belonged to the past. If modern poetry (and poor examples of it) were being anthologised as representative of the contemporary period, then it could *only* be the case that contemporary audiences would identify a gulf in the quality and merit of the work, and see that gulf as evidence that the past offered a finer poetic quality and merit than the present. The loss of interest in poetry then, and the crux of what Leavis meant by the ‘contemporary situation’, stemmed from his belief that criticism, in its failure to identify important contemporary work, was, in turn, disconnecting poetry from the relevance of the modern world.

As the poetry of the eighteenth century had changed from that of the seventeenth century, and the poetry of the present age from that of the nineteenth century, so too, felt Leavis, should such changes be reflected in the diligence and intelligence of the criticism. It was, therefore, to criticism (and its standards) that Leavis sought to turn in order restore the connection of poetry to the relevance and interest of the contemporary age and public. This critical agenda was also seen throughout Leavis’s other work in this period. Indeed, the

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p.11-12.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

necessity of modernising contemporary critical practice and standards, and furthermore, the consequence of a failure to do so, was re-emphasized three months later in the editorial manifesto of *Scrutiny*'s first issue in May 1932, as well in Leavis's introduction to *Towards Standards of Criticism* published the following year in 1933. The critical argument that united all three of them was Leavis's belief that criticism should be 'seriously preoccupied with the movement of modern civilisation'<sup>13</sup> and that literature should be valued, accordingly, in terms of the influence it produced upon the modern and 'contemporary sensibility'.<sup>14</sup>

For Bateson, however, this shift from what he termed 'the *understanding* to the *reproduction* of the past'<sup>15</sup> encouraged a 'lack of a sense of proportion.'<sup>16</sup> Bateson's argument was that '*understanding*' was essential to evaluation, and essential to the attainment of understanding was a contextual observation of a work's 'political, social, ecclesiastical and economical' history.<sup>17</sup> His basis for this belief was the view that: 'Every book must be relatable to a particular literary tradition; its divergences from that tradition must be explicable.'<sup>18</sup> Bateson believed that this provided a determinable means of identifying the sentiment of the poem's age (historical context), an indication of the intention of the author,<sup>19</sup> and thus, through enabling 'a true pursuit of the poet and the meaning of the poem',<sup>20</sup> a legitimate means of assessing a literary work's value. A '*reproduction*' of the past, however, in order merely to verify its resonance within the contemporary age and interests of the

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<sup>13</sup> F.R. Leavis, (ed.), 2008. 'A Manifesto', *Scrutiny: A Quarterly Review*, 1, 1932-33, 1, 1, 2-7, (Cambridge: CUP) p.3.

<sup>14</sup> F. R. Leavis, 1986. *Valuation in Criticism and Other Essays*, (ed.) G. Singh, (Cambridge: CUP) p.200.

<sup>15</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1934. *English Poetry and the English Language: An Experiment in Literary History*, (Oxford: Clarendon) p. v. Bateson's italics

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that irrespective of the virtue of Bateson's argument in 1934, he was writing at a time prior to significant contributions to debates about authorial intention later expressed by W.K. Wimsatt, M.C. Beardsley, Roland Barthes, E.D. Hirsch, and Sean Burke. The significance of these contributions in relation to the Leavis-Bateson debate, and furthermore, in relation to the wider theoretical considerations of this thesis, I discuss in the fifth chapter. This, however, is not to imply that Bateson predated all as an advocate of 'intention' in evaluative literary analysis. Later in this chapter, for example, I examine his position on authorial intention in relation to earlier methods in critical ideological history.

<sup>20</sup> Bateson, *E.P.E.L.* p.78.

modern world, was not; Bateson felt, a true or responsible method of approach. By reproduction Bateson was alluding, as he would later express to Leavis, to critical methods of evaluation whereby a literary work was assessed ‘as if it had been written yesterday’.<sup>21</sup> This type of reading, with its lack of grounding in historical context, constituted an entirely subjective, and therefore unverifiable, abstraction of literary engagement. However, just as Leavis had identified problems in the contemporary methods of criticism; Bateson had identified an ‘*impasse*’<sup>22</sup> in the philological methods of scholarship. In *English Poetry and the English Language* (published two years after Leavis’s *New Bearings*) Bateson brought this impasse into focus, by stating that:

The danger into which modern English scholarship is running is of not knowing when to stop. If to be relentlessly thorough and impeccably accurate is to be scholarly, what is there to prevent the aspiring scholar from tabulating the rhymes, let us say, in the *Theophilia* of Edward Benlowes (‘propitious still to blockheads’)? What could be more thorough—or more futile? To the antiquary, however, one piece of antiquity is as good as another, and a fact, any fact, is something ultimate. The application of the criteria by which one group of facts comes to seem more important than another is the provenance not of the antiquary but of the historian.<sup>23</sup>

Bateson presents his belief that that ‘impasse’ into which scholars were ‘drifting’<sup>24</sup> must instead be avoided by the way of a linguistic ‘historical technique’,<sup>25</sup> a technique that should centre on the understanding that ‘the real history of poetry is . . . the history of the changes in the kind of language in which successive poems have been written.’<sup>26</sup> While Bateson sought the best possible understanding of the poetry and the poet, his proposed emphasis on the exercise of propriety and specificity in scholarly engagement related to his belief that the understanding of literary work could only be achieved through analysis of language, not specifically the language of the poem itself, but the language of the age in which the poem

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<sup>21</sup> F. R. Leavis, 2008. ‘Correspondence’, *Scrutiny: A Quarterly Review* XIX, 4, 1952-53. (Cambridge: CUP) p. 323.

<sup>22</sup> Bateson, *E.P.E.L.* p. vi. Bateson’s italics

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p.v-vi.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p.v.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

was produced. As such his methodological proposition was that a diachronic study of linguistic ‘pressures’,<sup>27</sup> ‘idiosyncrasies’,<sup>28</sup> ‘tendencies’,<sup>29</sup> ‘word choice’,<sup>30</sup> and ‘word usage’<sup>31</sup> throughout specific periods in literary history, would enable a means of monitoring a work’s language in relation to the socio-economic and political pressures and influences upon the author. A particular consideration of Bateson’s proposal was that of identifying the words available to a particular poet in a particular given time throughout literary history, and the words the poet used. This relationship, Bateson felt, could lend a great deal of understanding about the poet and the poem, which in turn, could guide a reader towards a greater understanding of a work’s *intrinsic* significance and value.

By proposing an evaluative method centring on the linguistic conventions at the time of poetic composition, not as an evaluative end in itself, but *as a means of* understanding both the poem and poet, Bateson’s method was markedly distinct from emerging formalist approaches of understanding poems via a methodology focused predominately upon the intrinsic structures and encoding of the ‘black marks on the page.’<sup>32</sup> The method proposed by Bateson comprised an incremental logic whereby, while he ultimately intended an understanding of the poem and poet (the poet’s intention and intended meaning of the poem), this was to be achieved through an understanding of the language of the period, *then* of the language of the poem, and *then*, ‘and only then’,<sup>33</sup> an interpretation of the poet, within the poem, in relation to his historical hypostasis. Furthermore, Bateson argued that such an approach could provide a verifiable means of assessing the validity of one particular

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<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p.vii.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p.46.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Dean, ‘The Last Critic? The Importance of F.R. Leavis’, p.30. Also see accounts of the emergence of The New Criticism and Practical Criticism in several publications. My research has made use Stephen Matterson’s chapter ‘The New Criticism’, 2006. (ed.) P. Waugh, *Literary Theory and Criticism*. 166-177. John C. Ransom, 1973. *The New Criticism*, (new edn.) (Connecticut: Greenwood). M.H. Abrams, (ed.) 1999. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, (Boston: Heinle), and Peter Rawlings, 2006. *American Theorists of the Novel: Henry James, Lionel Trilling and Wayne C. Booth*, (London: Routledge).

<sup>33</sup> Bateson, *E.P.E.L.* p.vii.

interpretation over another, in that such validity could be determined by a particular interpretation's accuracy and attention to factual aspects of the work's composition and compositional history. A significant feature of Bateson's method was that it did not claim, as such, a direct means of accessing what, in Cartesian terms, would be called the 'elusive and private domain'<sup>34</sup> of the poet, in that Bateson was claiming that that 'the age's imprint in a poem is *not* to be traced to the *poet* but to the *language*'<sup>35</sup>—and from the *language* the poet could be realized in accurate—contextually supported—terms. With this in mind it can be seen that *E.P.E.L.* raises two main critical assertions: one entailing that extrinsic linguistic knowledge from beyond the text itself was necessary to the understanding of the value of a literary work, and second, that methods of critical approach in which extrinsic and factually verifiable historical information were consulted, could thus, in turn, be understood as possessing a degree of validity or invalidity.

Bateson's ideology then, if we are to understand it principally at its point of departure from Leavis's, centred on the belief that the analysis of formal structures alone (that is to say, the intrinsic and isolated composition of the text on the page) was insufficient as a means of evaluating a literary artistic composition. Proposing this view, Bateson states a warning: 'that attention to the internal language of the poem *'for its own sake'* evidences not the true poet but the mere artist.'<sup>36</sup> Indeed, literary art, Bateson felt, was a part of history, and thus evident

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<sup>34</sup> 'After the publication of Gilbert Ryle's *Concept of Mind* (1949) and Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), philosophers became increasingly sceptical of mind/body dualism, epitomized by René Descartes, which postulated an elusive private domain of mental life. To describe a person's thoughts, desires, and intentions, on the preferred view, was not to guess at a mysterious inner world to which only that person had direct access, but was to make complex judgment about the person's social interactions and observable responses. Intentions became part of the publically accessible realm, and literary works were deemed as good an indicator of intention as any other manifest behaviour. Undoubtedly this concept of the mind weakens anti-intentionalist claims about the unavailability of intention, but it does not in itself refute anti-intentionalism *per se*, for further claims about kinds of evidence and about the autonomy of the text are unaffected.' Peter Larmarque, 2006. 'The Intentional Fallacy', *Literary Theory and Criticism*. (ed.) P.Waugh. (Oxford: OUP) p.184.

<sup>35</sup> Bateson, *E.P.E.L.* p.vi.

<sup>36</sup> Bateson, *E.P.E.L.* p. 91. Bateson's full quote reads: 'It would seem', Newman summed up, 'that attention to the language for its own sake evidences not the true poet but the mere artist.' Bateson quotes from John Newman, 'Poetry with Reference to Aristotle's Poetics' (1892) as reprinted in E.D. Jones, (ed.) 1916. *English Critical Essays*, Nineteenth Century, (London: OUP) p.252.

within it were the pressures of the age upon the language which it used. For this reason Bateson argued that an understanding of history was essential both in discovering differences between particular works of literary art and identifying the idiosyncrasies which made each work (and its author) unique, significant, or valuable. He would state:

Art, considered as the subject matter of criticism, does stand still. But art may also be considered as history, and as history it cannot stand still. It develops every decade, often every year, and it is only by virtue of these developments that it becomes the concern of the historian. If there is something in common in the novels of Henry James and Richardson, there is also quite obviously something distinguishable, something that they have not in common. And the business of the literary historian, while always employing the tools and accepting the hierarchies of the literary critic, is to isolate, define, and explain that ‘something not in common’.<sup>37</sup>

This extract, particularly representative of Bateson’s argument as outlined in the early sections of his *E.P.E.L.* thesis, highlights his stress upon the significance of literature as a ‘changing’ and ‘heterogeneous’ flux.<sup>38</sup> While literary critics often displayed a tendency to group together similarities between writers and works, it was equally important, in Bateson’s view, to draw attention to essential ‘differences’ in periods of literary history in order to define and classify the evolution of literary development and change. He emphasizes in italics, the view that, ‘*it is these changes of language only that are due to the pressure of social and intellectual tendencies.*’<sup>39</sup> Bateson’s *E.P.E.L.* thesis (unlike some of his later work)<sup>40</sup> was not an explicit challenge of Leavis’s critical ideology *per se*; that said, it did, by implication of its methodological proposal constitute an attack on the emerging critical school at Cambridge as seen in the work of I.A Richards, William Empson, and T.S. Eliot. That said, it is clear to see, that Bateson’s desire to approach literary history in this way, and Leavis’s desire to promote a focus on poetry as it reads in relation to the contemporary, world can be seen in various systematic representations. One particularly useful example of this comes by

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<sup>37</sup> Bateson, *E.P.E.L.* p.6-7.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p.vi.

<sup>40</sup> There is no mention of Leavis *per se* in Bateson’s *E.P.E.L.*, however, explicit attacks upon Leavis and his critical positions *are* later made by Bateson in ‘The Function of Criticism at the Present Time’ (1953).

way of an introductory extract from the English Faculty at Cambridge University as it is expressed today (2008- ):

The English Faculty was founded in 1919. It was the first Faculty in the country to encourage the study of English Literature up to the present day and the first to approach English literature from a 'literary' point of view, rather than as a manifestation of the history of the language. Founders of the method of practical criticism, including I.A. Richards and William Empson, were members of the Faculty in its early years and made a lasting impression on how literature is studied today.<sup>41</sup>

Interestingly then, in expressing the critical approach they seek to *elevate*, the Faculty underlines one most closely aligned to the critical practice of Leavis; the type focused upon the 'literary' and 'literariness' of the text as central to critical evaluation. Moreover, it can be seen that modern Cambridge, in their explicit detailing of the approach they wish to *avoid*, have also pin-pointed the very direction that Bateson's *E.P.E.L.* thesis had sought to steer literary analysis. Indeed, Bateson stated, in what would now appear direct antithesis to the Cambridge Faculty, that it *was* 'to words...their history and science' that the study of poetry should turn; 'that poetry develops *pari passu* with the words it uses, that its history is a part of the general history of language, and that its changes of style and mood are merely the reflection of changing tendencies in the uses to which language is being put.'<sup>42</sup> Bateson develops this idea, and thus his polarization from the Cambridge critical ideology, through the belief that in order to define the poem's 'poetic style...what we must do is, first of all, is to isolate the influence of the age on the theory and practice of the language, and secondly (but only secondly), when the linguistic tendencies have been defined, to examine their effect on the poetry.'<sup>43</sup> While Bateson would face Leavis's rejection of his approach, the basis for Bateson's move towards a factually determinable context in which to set literary evaluation was that he sought 'a more satisfactory', 'intelligent', 'comprehensive' and 'historical

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<sup>41</sup>University of Cambridge. 2008. *Faculty of English*. [Online] <http://www.english.cam.ac.uk>. [Accessed 10 January 11].

<sup>42</sup> Bateson, *E.P.E.L.* p.25.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*,vii.



technique’.<sup>44</sup> In tracing what may be regarded as a general propensity for objectivity within Bateson’s evaluative and scholarly practice, some critics (I think particularly of Valentine Cunningham) have felt his positivist determinacy to be symptomatic of a desire ‘to always be demonstrably right.’<sup>45</sup> According to Cunningham, Bateson, ‘once an impish school boy, mustn’t only be right, he must be dazzlingly, shockingly right.’<sup>46</sup> This is an important point, not merely as a detail of personality trait, but rather in the extended significance of *why* Bateson sought so ardently a determinable means of measuring the validity of interpretative and evaluative readings. Later, in 1975, in a memoir entitled ‘Confessions of an Eng. Lit. Tutor’, Bateson would write:

As far as I know, I was one of the few Oxford tutors who took careful notes of each undergraduate essay as it was read to him. And prominent among each set of notes there was almost always a list of its factual errors, which I found it convenient to point out and correct as soon as the essay had been read . . . Once the last erroneous date, title or quotation had been corrected my tutee was often left limp and bewildered, and I could sail in with my rival interpretation of the poem or poet . . .<sup>47</sup>

Bateson, by his own admission recalls having left his students ‘limp and bewildered’ by a succession of factual notes of which they had not, as diligently as he, attended to. This method of his tutorship thus enabled him to ‘sail in’ with his ‘rival interpretation’. As such it would appear that Bateson, throughout his teaching, felt that a work’s factual context could be used as a measure of a particular interpretation’s validity. To this effect the logic was: where there was evidence of factual inaccuracy in scholarship and evaluation there was a basis to dismiss the legitimacy of a reading, and thus by extension, the validity of one’s judgment of the work’s merit or value. The inherent problem of such a method is that

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<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, vi.

<sup>45</sup> Valentine Cunningham, 1979. ‘F.W. Bateson: Scholar, Critic, and Scholar-Critic.’ *Essays in Criticism*, XXIX, 2, 139-155.p.141. ‘Undoubtedly Bateson’s own relish for facts, his desire to prove himself triumphantly right (‘I was always so sure that I was right’), his anxiety always to demonstrate his rightness (‘the ultimate *raison d’être* of criticism within modern mass society . . . is to be demonstrably *right*’), could occasionally lead him to an irritating parade of name and number.’ V. Cunningham quotes Bateson, 1966, ‘The Function of Criticism at the Present Time’, *English Poetry: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd edn., (London: Longmans) p.183. and also, Bateson, 1975, ‘Confessions of an Eng. Lit. Tutor’, *Pelican: The Magazine of Corpus Christi College*, III, 2, 20-21.p.21.

<sup>46</sup> Cunningham, ‘...Scholar-Critic’, p.145

<sup>47</sup> Bateson, ‘Confessions of an Eng. Lit Tutor...’, p.21.

Bateson here is guilty of constructing a model of: assumption-upon-assumption. The nuance of Bateson's phrase 'sail in with my *rival* interpretation', suggests of course, by implication, that Bateson himself was aware that his interpretation was merely a *rivalling* interpretation. Granted, he would nullify competing interpretations on the basis that his reading was grounded more fully in the facts of the work's history and so forth, but Bateson assumes that such facts are legitimate grounds for arriving at a judgment of a work's artistic or aesthetic value. While extending one's critical analysis beyond the literary object is seen as beneficial in Bateson's view, it is often felt (particularly in strands of formalism, such as in anti-intentionalist theory) that such a critical tendency is representative of a method distrusting of a literary work's self-sufficiency in communicating 'all that needs expressed'.<sup>48</sup>

Leavis's and Bateson's involvement within the larger perspective of what has been termed the 'crisis of methods',<sup>49</sup> can be observed as moving towards a type of critical value discrepancy wherein which Bateson believes that a literary work should be explored and evaluated in relation to its socio-economic and linguistic historical context. Naturally, by extension, such an assumption entails a critical (or scholarly) tendency to make a judgment

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<sup>48</sup> See Wimsatt and Beardsley's. 'The Intentional Fallacy' (1946) essay from *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*, (Kentucky: UPK) 'If the poet succeeded in doing it, then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do. And if the poet did not succeed, then the poem is not adequate evidence, and the critic must go outside the poem—for evidence of an intention that did not become effective in the poem.' p.4. And also, in Wimsatt and Beardsley's essay 'Poetry and Morals', they state: 'We inquire now not about origins, nor about effects, but about work so far as it can be considered by itself as a body of meaning. Neither the qualities of the author's mind nor the effects of the poem upon a reader's mind should be confused with the moral quality of the meaning expressed by the poem itself.' p. 87. See also, David Newton de Molina (ed.) 1976. *On Literary Intention*, (Edinburgh: EUP); Gary Iseminger (ed.) 1995. *Intention and Interpretation*, (Philadelphia: Temple)

<sup>49</sup> The word 'crisis' and term 'crisis of methods' have found widespread usage in modern literary theory. The term is found as the title of the introduction to *Re-Reading English* edited by P. Widdowson, a collection of essays which discusses the role of Post-structuralist and Marxist approaches literature in secondary and tertiary education, and the future of the discipline of 'English'. Widdowson argues that new critical methodologies and theories have revealed the bourgeois ideology inherent in conventional educational methods and procedures, which he concedes, were (and still probably are) entrenched in most English Departments throughout Britain – practices that can be summed up as the exercise of teaching students to interpret and enjoy a collection of special and valued texts. Carol Atherton's essay 'The Organisation of Literary Knowledge: The Study of English in the Late Nineteenth Century' from *The Organisation of Knowledge in Victorian Britain* (ed.) Martin Daunt (2005) states that: 'The last two decades have witnessed a number of concerns about the existence of a 'Crisis in English Studies', a sense that traditional assumptions about the nature and purpose of the study of English literature are being eroded by a version of the discipline that is much more fragmentary and uncertain.' p.220. The work of Paul de Man, and Josephine Guy and Ian Small has also examined the ontology of 'crisis' theory and its implications upon literary studies as an academic subject.

based on the text's ability to reflect or represent linguistic, social, or intellectual history. Leavis on the other hand, particularly by evidence of *New Bearings*, appears to elevate a critical practice which argues that a work of literature should attempt to produce certain effects on the reading audience by appeals to contemporary intelligence, traditional cultural values, morality, and sensibility. Leavis's criticism, therefore, in its difference to Bateson's, would thus be inclined to make assessment of a work's value according to its success in achieving those aims. In view of this, the critical approaches and methodologies promoted by Leavis and Bateson (those that would form the basis of the contention between them) can be seen, even from this pre-debate period, to stem from discrepancies in terms of what they respectively believe literature should achieve. It was virtually inevitable then, if they were to collide, that these differing literary values would put Leavis and Bateson at odds in regards to achieving an evaluative method that could encompass their essentially antithetical critical ideals.

Whilst it has been said of Leavis that his 'greatest strength'<sup>50</sup> was his 'consistent refusal to define a clear theoretical basis for his work',<sup>51</sup> it is nevertheless true that a characteristic of his critical tendency is that it closely resembles, at least in a broad sense, that outlined in the earlier quoted Cambridge tenet: 'the approach to literature from a "literary point" of view'.<sup>52</sup> Tracing an understanding of Leavis at this time it is also useful to observe his personal and ideological situation as an academic and critic. In October 1931 Leavis's period of tenure at Emmanuel College, Cambridge was over. Furthermore he had learned in the January of that year that it was not to be renewed. Concerned, and at the end of his probationary position of three years, he 'decided to do some extended writing so as to improve his academic standing by publication'.<sup>53</sup> It was in this period that he produced *New*

<sup>50</sup> B.K. Grant, 2006, 'Criticism-Ideology', *Shirmer Encyclopedia of Film*, (Ontario: Shirmer Reference)p.6

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> From (*fn.41*): Cambridge Faculty's Introduction to English Studies.

<sup>53</sup> Ian MacKillop, 1995. *F.R. Leavis: A Life in Criticism*, (London: Penguin) p.119.

*Bearings*. *Scrutiny*, the journal that hosted the debate, and which would evolve from particular concerns raised in *New Bearings*, has a history that over-arches the Leavis-Bateson conflict, coming into existence, as it did, twenty-five months before Leavis reviewed Bateson's *E.P.E.L.* Having written 'copiously for the quarterly from the start'<sup>54</sup> Leavis was the most significant figure in the journal's conception and editorial life. Indeed, both the emergence of *Scrutiny* at Cambridge, and the principles of criticism it set forth to represent can be related to institutional pressures and intellectual concerns in Leavis's career in 1931 and early 1932.<sup>55</sup> *Scrutiny*'s 'Manifesto', published as the first piece in the first issue of *Scrutiny* in May 1932 was authored, as noted, by 'the editors', of whom, for the first two issues Leavis was not one.<sup>56</sup> His influence, nevertheless, on the magazine's programme is evident in the related concerns of his earlier work. Specifically, as it has been argued by P.W. Musgrave in his essay 'Scrutiny and Education' the principal focus of *Scrutiny* was, as noted at the beginning, 'literary criticism at a time when substantial changes in method were initiated in Britain by such writers as T. S. Eliot and I. A. Richards.'<sup>57</sup>

If we are to consider what is meant by these 'substantial changes', it is, as Musgrave suggests, to Richards and Eliot that the focus tends to shift. There were several major works published in the 1920s by these two influential critics and these had had an effect upon Leavis's criticism, and more widely, throughout British academic methods of the period. Richards's *The Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924), *Science and Poetry* (1926), and *Practical Criticism* (1929) all advocated a type of criticism that focused predominantly upon

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<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p.147.

<sup>55</sup> As MacKillop's biography of Leavis details there was, at the time, light talk of an interest from Harvard, but Leavis eventually became lecturer at Downing College, Cambridge, and in December he was appointed as the College's Director of Studies in English. Prior to the confirmation of his new post at Downing, Leavis sold a property which would, by chance, allow him to finance his plans for *Scrutiny*. p.134.

<sup>56</sup> For the first two issues Leavis was not an editor, first appearing on the title page of Volume 1, Number 3. We have already seen that he liked to work (in college patois) as 'back-coach'. MacKillop later notes: 'As to staying out of the editorship of the first numbers of *Scrutiny*, it is possible Leavis held back because as an editor it would have been awkward for Denys Harding to contribute a review of *New Bearings in English Poetry* to the first issue.' MacKillop, *F.R. Leavis*, p.147.

<sup>57</sup> Musgrave, 'Scrutiny and Education', p.253.

the text itself. This focus upon the linguistic object, that is to say, on the poem or text as it stood on the page, in a sense laid the foundations for Practical Criticism, and by extension (particularly through the work of William Empson) the New Criticism that would later develop prominently in the educational reforms of a post-World-War-Two United States.<sup>58</sup> For Richards the objective of such an approach was to encourage the reader's concentration upon the words on the page, rather than preconceived or received beliefs about the text. Famously, Richards carried out several experiments at Cambridge in which students were purposefully denied extrinsic information regarding the text they were set to interpret and evaluate. In the last of the above mentioned publications, *Practical Criticism*, Richards reported on the results of the experiments, and his conclusion was that reading literature in such a way focused the reader with the work as a sphere of activity of its own. Leavis, while he was not in complete agreement with Richard's methods, nevertheless felt that this close analysis enabled the text to perform, and thus be evaluated in such a way, so that the morality of the text as presented in its composition (structure, poetic devices and so forth) could be interpreted as a beneficial critical activity; his belief being, that critics could therefore, via such an approach, bring the whole of 'their sensibility to bear on a literary text and test its sincerity and moral seriousness.'<sup>59</sup>

Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1920), and *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (1920) offered critical ideas that Leavis, by his own admission, admired. The 'substantial changes' alluded to by Musgrave, certainly as far as Leavis was concerned, centred around three notable concepts in Eliot's criticism: 'dissociation of

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<sup>58</sup> When considering the theoretical implications and values of text-based criticism, such as in Practical Criticism and The New Criticism, where evaluative emphasis centered on the work itself, it is important to note also the practicality of such an approach. Returning U.S. soldiers, for example, who had spent several years in military service, were deemed less likely to have sufficient scholarly knowledge of literary history or for that matter the historical or social contexts of much literature studied. Thus The New Criticism was particularly beneficial to U.S. educational reforms in that it promoted analytical emphasis the literature's internal composition as opposed to extrinsic factors of consideration. In this sense not only is it important to consider the social and historical context of literary art itself, but also the social and historical context surrounding the emergence of particular approaches to literary analysis. Also see Fekete, p.19-20, 23-28, and 174-183.

<sup>59</sup> Chris Baldick, 1987. *The Social Mission of English Criticism 1848-1932*, (Oxford: OUP) p.28.

sensibility',<sup>60</sup> 'tradition',<sup>61</sup> and 'altered expression'.<sup>62</sup> These values deriving, on an immediately historical level, from Eliot, also met with another aspect of Leavis's critical interest, that being his focus on the 'cultural and educational conditions within which literature was studied'.<sup>63</sup> For Leavis the university was the 'creative centre of civilization',<sup>64</sup> and should not become a privatised means of systematically and 'mechanically'<sup>65</sup> producing students for a 'monstrous industry'.<sup>66</sup> Another feature of Leavis's interest that gave rise to the concept of the *Scrutiny* journal was his interest in the university and in literary education. Indeed, *Scrutiny* was founded, suggest both MacKillop and Musgrave alike, through the educational influence of several American journals such as the *Symposium* which had been

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<sup>60</sup> Eliot's term 'disassociation of sensibility' is taken up by Storer in his account of Leavis and Eliot in the *New Bearings* chapter. Storer writes: 'Eliot used the phrase 'disassociation of sensibility' in an essay on 'The Metaphysical Poets' to express his sense of how English poetry in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries differed from the poetry of the early seventeenth century.' p. 58. It is notable that *New Bearings*, for Leavis, whilst a tribute in many ways to Eliot, was precisely an exercise in developing a critical consciousness between the past (the seventeenth century and its poetry to the present (such as the later era of the nineteenth century). pp.57-61. Storer's point thus re-integrates consideration of Leavis's belief highlighted in the beginning of this chapter regarding the need to keep alive and vital the modernity and relevance of criticism to the contemporary age.

<sup>61</sup> A critical leitmotif throughout Eliot's best known essay, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', was belief that literature does not possess its own isolated and complete meaning; rather it finds significance through a 'dynamic' and complex relationship with 'tradition'; that is, 'all the poetry that has been written'. Leavis subscribed to this, and some Leavisian critics, Storer a particular example, claim that Leavis took it further in applying its principle to the evaluation of novels as well as poetry.

<sup>62</sup> The phrase 'altered expression' offered for Leavis a sort of mid-ground with regards to the role of the author in the artistic process. By this I mean, Leavis, in *New Bearings* did not want to disregard the author's life in quite the total sense advocated in Richards's work. Leavis advocated a more moderate belief that 'literary' traditions, though they must be considered 'literary', were 'kept alive and viable by the great individuals who were able to change them.

<sup>63</sup> Richard Storer, 2009. *F.R. Leavis*, (London: Routledge) p.2.

<sup>64</sup> F.R. Leavis, 1975. *The Living Principle: English as a Discipline of Thought* (London: Chatto & Windus) p. 24.

<sup>65</sup> The word 'mechanical' was used by Leavis (and several Leavisian scholars) as a construct of antithesis to the agrarian and traditional values of the 'Organic Community' that Leavis throughout his career expressed a preference for. This was evident in Leavis's PhD thesis of 1921 'The Relationship of Journalism to Literature: Studies in the Rise and Earlier Development of the Press in England.' Day argues that 'both Leavis's cultural and literary criticism is based on the destruction of what he called the 'Organic Community', by the advent of the machine and mass culture.' p.131. Another good source is Storer's Leavis study, specifically the chapter 'Culture'. pp. 42-53. See also *Two Cultures? The Significance of C. P. Snow, Being the Richmond Lecture*, (1962) with an essay on Sir Charles Snow's Rede Lecture, by Michael Yudkin. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962); Roger Kimball, 1994. 'The Two Cultures' Today: On the C.P. Snow-F.R. Leavis controversy', *The New Criterion*, 12, 2, 10-18.; Guy Ortolano, 2002. 'Two Cultures, One University: The Institutional Origins of the "Two Cultures" Controversy', *A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 34, 4, 606-624.

<sup>66</sup> Patricia Waugh, 2010. A review of Guy Ortolano, 'The Two Cultures Controversy: Science, Literature and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain.' *Reviews in History*, 849, 1, 1-11, p.3.

introduced to Leavis from Princeton.<sup>67</sup> Leavis and his group of editors (Donald Culver and L.C. Knights)<sup>68</sup> were keen to apply a similar model in Britain, specifically, ‘to do the criticism that is not done in the commercial press.’<sup>69</sup> This centralisation of Leavis’s chief critical concerns — poetry in the modern world, educational standards, and a concern with the corporate industrialisation of the arts — thus led to the idea and founding of *Scrutiny*, and within it, Leavis would engage with these issues bringing them into a peer-public and academic arena.<sup>70</sup> Such was the respect and reverence for the journal amongst the British literary-academic class,<sup>71</sup> that several critics, Richard Storer being a particular example, deduce today (2009) that ‘Leavis’s influence was more concentrated, more carefully sustained, and in the end more widely disseminated, than that of any of his contemporaries.’<sup>72</sup> Another belief that appears to unite several Leavisian scholars is that Leavis, and his critical ideology, has been widely subject to false abstraction and systematic distortion.<sup>73</sup> As the debate will show there is a case to be made that Leavis himself appears at times, contradictory and ambiguous, and this may, in part, factor in the type of problem that these critics, most notably Gary Day, observe in the many attempts in the last thirty years to cohere his various critical concerns into a neat or concrete theoretical position.<sup>74</sup> His debate with

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<sup>67</sup> MacKillop, p.145. and Musgrave, p.255.

<sup>68</sup> See MacKillop’s chapter ‘The Year of Scrutiny’ pp.145-150.

<sup>69</sup> MacKillop, p.145.

<sup>70</sup> Terry Eagleton notes that ‘*Scrutiny* was not just a journal, but the focus of a moral and cultural crusade: its adherents would go out to the schools and universities to do battle there, nurturing through the study of literature the kind of rich, complex, mature, discriminating, morally serious responses (all key *Scrutiny* terms) which would equip individuals to survive in a mechanized society of trashy romances, alienated labour, banal advertisements and vulgarizing mass media.’ Terry Eagleton, 1983. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, (Oxford: Blackwell), p.33.

<sup>71</sup> *Scrutiny* had some notable subscriptions from people such as ‘T.S. Eliot, George Santayana, R.H. Tawney and Aldous Huxley.’ This information from MacKillop’s biography of Leavis also includes the detail that: ‘The initial print [of *Scrutiny*] [in May 1931] was run for 500 copies . . . An additional 250 copies were ordered and sold. The print for later issues went up to 1,000 (but never exceeded 1,400).’ p.146

<sup>72</sup> Storer, *Leavis*, p.1.

<sup>73</sup> This certainly seems to be the agreed point in the Leavisian scholarship of R.P. Bilan and Gary Day as I will examine in chapter 3.

<sup>74</sup> Gary Day in his *Re-reading Leavis* (1996) asked, ‘who is this Leavis that can have such affect?’: ‘Although there are many critics that have argued against his particular judgments and although some have challenged one or other of his general assumptions and procedures there is no one, according to Francis Mulhern, who has “produced anything resembling an integrated account and assessment of his aesthetic and critical position”. This is a more sober version of Garry Watson’s view that Leavis’s work has been systematically distorted and

Bateson, however, if assessed responsibly, is good grounds for an analysis of Leavis's autotelic ideology, in that it comprises precisely Leavis's arguments in action against Bateson.

In 1934 what should be said of Bateson as an academic was that he acknowledged that his criticism was less able than his scholarship. This was a concern for him in the early 1930s and he would later state that: 'Dr. Leavis at his best is a much better literary critic than I am, but when it comes to scholarship I am perhaps the better man of the two—though I agree cheerfully that nothing I have contributed to literary history is equivalent in that sphere to his unique contribution to criticism'.<sup>75</sup> Valentine Cunningham notes of Bateson that: 'As he came over to the English School as an undergraduate out of the dictionaries, the footnotes, the dry linguistic exactitudes of Classics, so he started his critical career as a 'minor professional scholar, working for four bob an hour as general editor of the *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*'.<sup>76</sup> Cunningham goes on to regard Bateson's *E.P.E.L.* as among the best of Bateson's work. This, in Cunningham's estimation, was due to the fact that Bateson demonstrated 'how a sense of the contextual fact was vital to a reading of literary texts. In fact', Cunningham continues, 'he proved again and again how critical 'judgment' depended on 'knowledge, and ever fresh knowledge'.<sup>77</sup> Bateson was born in Cheshire and educated at Charterhouse and at Trinity College, Oxford. He took a BA in English (second class), and then the B.Litt., which he completed in 1927. From 1927-29 he held a Commonwealth Fellowship at Harvard and from 1929 to 1940 he worked on the *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*. The latter work, as well as several publications that

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ridiculed with critics ignoring what he does say in favour of what they believe he says – or even want him to say. Day states: 'It is this absence of a comprehensive account of his criticism that has given rise to a myth of Leavis which is the source of the strong reactions that his name can still provoke nearly 20 years after his death.' Day, *Re-reading Leavis*, p.ix.

<sup>75</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1964. 'The Alternative to Scrutiny', *Essays in Criticism*, XIV, 1, 10-21. p.12.

<sup>76</sup> Cunningham, 'Scholar-Critic...', p.142

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*



rendered him to many as a ‘polemical dissenter’,<sup>78</sup> would, in later years, see him become the General Editor of the Longman Annotated English Poets series, as well as Special University Lecturer at Oxford and a fellow and tutor of Corpus Christi College until he retired in 1969. Bateson’s *E.P.E.L.* thesis certainly provoked Leavis and those central to the Cambridge critical movement. But if the post-Harvard doctoral student had not had his debate with Leavis it is very possible that a similar debate would have ensued from several other quarters in Britain and on the continent. Next door in Ireland, for example, T.P. Dunning in an untitled review in *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* perceived several significant deficiencies within Bateson’s argument.<sup>79</sup> Beyond, there was René Wellek who also held strong views on Bateson’s thesis, though it should be said that not all were critical, as I shall later explore. Wellek’s most important assessment of *E.P.E.L.* in terms of charting the nature and history of Bateson’s approaches was that they were reflected and paralleled in the earlier Russian Formalist movement.<sup>80</sup> The connective Wellek raises between Bateson and Russian Formalism must be approached with caution, for while Bateson’s methods were, in certain respects, close to the Russian Formalist programme, in others, he fell away from it. In order to begin an understanding of this connection, it should be said that central to both Bateson and the Russian formalists was the belief that a way out of the crisis of methods lay in the close collaboration between literary history and linguistics. Boris Eichenbaum’s essay ‘The

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<sup>78</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1972. *Essays in Critical Dissent*, (London: Longman) Inner back cover sleeve note.

<sup>79</sup> See T.P. Dunning, 1952. *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 41, 164, 390- 392, where Dunning argues that: ‘The critics Mr. Bateson chooses to attack in this first part of the book are not these ‘academic’ writers, but the Romantic critics (amongst whom Mr. Lucas and Mr. C. S. Lewis are cast). Indeed, Mr. Bateson’s book is intended to give “a decent and final interment” to Romantic criticism in general. However, it must be said that Mr. Bateson displays only a partial understanding of the ‘Romantic’ critics he opposes and if he inters anything it is something which he has largely created himself...It is a pity that in his criticism of these writers, Mr. Bateson is so sweeping and so prone to over-simplification: for the exuberance of Romantic criticism badly needs to be corrected by logical analysis, and the balance upset by their tendency to regard the poet as Seer rather than as Maker needs to be redressed. For that reason, some of what Mr. Bateson says here is just and, to a degree, satisfying.’ p.391.

<sup>80</sup> Rene Wellek, 1979. ‘The Literary Theories of F.W. Bateson’, *Essays in Criticism*, XXIX, 1, 112 -123. p.112.

Theory of the “Formal Method” argues that ‘since literature is made of language, linguistics will be a foundational element of the science of literature.’<sup>81</sup> Similarly, Bateson writes that:

The critical difference between the words, taken as one element, and every other conceivable constituent of a poem is this: The words make the poem; other qualities can only add to it. A poem without words is not a poem at all; whereas a poem without simplicity (such as Donne’s ‘Anatomy’), or without sensuousness (such as Pope’s ‘Essay on Man’), or without passion (such as Keats’s ‘Fancy’), if possibly not easy or exciting or profound, does not cease ipso facto to be poetry.<sup>82</sup>

Both Bateson and the Russian formalists, in this sense, sought ultimately to produce ‘a science of literature that would be both independent and factual’;<sup>83</sup> that since literature is made of language, linguistics will be a foundational element of the science of literature. Boris Eichenbaum, along with Roman Jakobson and several other key figures of the Russian formalism movement had arrived at their critical position several years earlier than Bateson (between 1905-1915). Wellek himself notes that Bateson may have, in the composition of his own piece, been completely unaware of the Russian Formalist movement altogether. While significant connections are certainly evident,<sup>84</sup> it is not altogether responsible to identify Bateson’s ideology as with Russian formalism. Indeed, while the parallel may be useful in accounting for certain aspects of Bateson’s ideological differences to Leavis, Bateson would depart from the formalist doctrine in several crucial instances, just as Leavis can be said to depart in his own way from the Practical Criticism of Cambridge.<sup>85</sup> For Bateson, this was

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<sup>81</sup> Boris. M. Eichenbaum, 1965. ‘The Theory of the ‘Formal Method’’, *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, (ed.) Lee T. Lemon, and Marion J. Reis, (Nebraska: Uni. Nebraska) p.88.

<sup>82</sup> Bateson, *E.P.E.L.* p.15.

<sup>83</sup> Victor Erlich, 1980. *Russian Formalism*, (The Hague: Moulton) p. 212.

<sup>84</sup> I think particularly of the two general underlying principles related to the Russian Formalist study of literature: first, literature itself, or rather, those of its features that distinguish it from other human activities, must constitute the object of inquiry of literary theory; second, ‘literary facts’ have to be prioritized over the metaphysical commitments of literary criticism, whether philosophical, aesthetic or psychological.’ For Bateson, the main endeavour of the critical function should, he felt, to consist in ‘defining a set of properties specific to poetic language, be it poetry or prose, recognizable by their ‘artfulness’ and consequently analyzing them as such.’ By extension therefore, and by removing attention to the history of language, Bateson, whose approach to critical analysis depended upon such factual information as the author’s environment and the date in history of the work’s composition, would find great difficulty with such seeming limitations to the critic’s analytical palette as proposed, he felt, in the mandates of Practical Criticism.

<sup>85</sup> This is a point Storer makes when he stresses that ‘we will probably misunderstand both “Practical Criticism” and Leavis’s approach to reading, then, if we start by treating them as identical.’

most evident in the sense that the Russian formalists sought to break from the methodology of traditionalist Russian criticism by proposing that literature was an independent, autonomous activity and not an extension of social, political or historic reality.<sup>86</sup> Bateson did not agree that literature should be viewed as existing independently from external conditions or that literary language was distinct from the ordinary uses of language, points he would express directly to Leavis. The value, in this thesis, of both situating and un-situating Leavis and Bateson and their critical ideologies within wider theoretical trends is that it mobilises their debate as a framework in which to observe how the ideological evolution of critical schools and movements over the century developed. Also it is to say that these two men are representative of a bricolage of varying critical sentiment abstracted from several strands of Formalist, Practical, and New Critical twentieth-century formulas as well as adaptations of the pre-existing critical ideologies of Arnold and Johnson. We can trace Leavis's and Bateson's personalities and characters as the catalysts of the ensuing debate, and deduce from the tone of their earlier writing that their eventual argument would be severely combative. Indeed Bateson was willing to concede in notably few matters, and ideologically speaking, was ardent in his belief that critical analysis depended upon knowledge of context and that history was not to be replaced by the interests of the present. Bateson's relationship with Oxford (where he encountered professional and ideological opposition) is perhaps a consequence of, as Cunningham suggests, his being intelligent, dynamic, as well as disruptive.<sup>87</sup> Leavis, as I have noted, was influential, and whilst this cannot be denied, the point has been made that 'influence' may be an insufficient word to use in relation to Leavis,

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<sup>86</sup> Their proposal, therefore, as documented in the work of Victor Erlich, is that literary analysis should focus on 'rhythm, word order, referential meaning and intonation that interact and construct the dynamic and value of a literary work'; in this sense it moves closer to the type of criticism that Leavis, and by extension Cambridge, had sought to promote.

<sup>87</sup> Despite harbouring (particularly in his early career) a dislike of several colleagues, Bateson was important to Oxford, with one reason being the prestige surrounding his editing of the *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* (1940). (See additional notes on this in Chapter 2.)

given that he was a ‘controversial figure who divided opinion as much as he shaped it, and he was resented and disliked almost as much as he was respected and admired.’<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Storer, *F.R. Leavis*, p. 2.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE LEAVIS-BATESON DEBATE: THE 1935 EXCHANGES

In this chapter I look at the exchanges between Leavis and Bateson in *Scrutiny* in 1935. My aim is to provide an analysis of the critical issues that arose from Leavis's reading of Bateson's *English Poetry and the English Language* (1934). I will also observe the structure and style of argumentation within Leavis's review of the book, Bateson's reply, and Leavis's rejoinder, as well as highlighting the distinctions made between literary history and literary criticism. In evaluating the correspondences in this way I aim to assess how the arguments made by Leavis and Bateson reflect both a determination and anxiety in relation to the pursuit of methodological objectivity in approaches to the study of literature.

The debate began in *Scrutiny*'s 'Comments and Reviews' section<sup>1</sup> with Leavis's review of *E.P.E.L.* Leavis opened his review with the following statement:

Mr. Bateson introduces his essay with some just criticism of the academic study of literature. The essay itself constitutes a much more radical criticism. For the unprofitable issue of an intention and initiative in themselves so admirable must be charged to academic deficiencies. A critic as interested and energetic as Mr. Bateson ought not to have been able to be so unprovided with the elementary tools for his job, so unprepared by the elementary training, and so unaware of his plight.<sup>2</sup>

It can be seen from this that Leavis did not receive Bateson's thesis in a positive way. Noting that he used the term 'critic' to describe Bateson Leavis states that Bateson would 'repudiate'<sup>3</sup> the 'description'<sup>4</sup> because he wished to differentiate his method of approach from

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<sup>1</sup> The 'Comments and Reviews' section was a standard section in almost all of the issues of *Scrutiny* published. It is notable that Leavis's other review in this issue, a review of Marianne Moore's poetry, was also one of negative response. Within it, Leavis criticised the praise that T.S. Eliot bestowed upon her work. See F.R. Leavis, 2008. *Scrutiny, IV, 1935-1936*, (Cambridge: CUP). p.87-90. Bateson would go on to state that Leavis's frustration (and negativity) at this time (May/June 1935) may have been partially heightened due to his severe suffering from 'hay-fever'. F.W. Bateson, 1964. 'Alternative to *Scrutiny*, *Essays in Criticism*, XIV, 1, 10-20. p.13.

<sup>2</sup> F.R Leavis, 2008. 'A Review', *Scrutiny, IV, 1935-1936*, Cambridge: CUP) p.96.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

criticism—and call it ‘*literary history*’.<sup>5</sup> That such a distinction was intended in *E.P.E.L.* can be seen in Bateson’s comment that:

Literary history, whatever it is, is not a department of literary criticism. Ideally, indeed, the two activities do not even overlap; the one is the *complement* of the other. They bear, that is, the same relation to each other that the science of organic chemistry bears to biology; the subject-matter and the method are the same, the difference is in the initial assumptions involved.<sup>6</sup>

For Leavis, however, the construct of the separation was fallacious. This was because the ‘kind of history’<sup>7</sup> that Bateson promoted was ‘something more than the usual compilation for the use of examinees—names, titles, dates, ‘facts about,’ irrelevancies, superficial comments and labour-saving descriptions’.<sup>8</sup> In attempting ‘something more’ than the recovery of factual details about a literary work, argued Leavis, Bateson’s history went beyond the order of determinable and factual truth, and entered the judicial and subjective domain of critical judgement and ‘discrimination’.<sup>9</sup> The significance of this, according to Leavis, was that due to its dependence on decisions of a critical nature ‘such a history’<sup>10</sup> did not possess the ‘concrete’<sup>11</sup> ‘truth’<sup>12</sup> and ‘fact’<sup>13</sup> that Bateson claimed it to possess.

In an attempt to highlight and expose how Bateson’s ‘radical’<sup>14</sup> history intended to work in light of such a distinction, Leavis reprints Bateson’s statement that:

[The] objection to regarding literature as a function of the social organism is the literary critic’s objection—not that it cannot be done, but that it can only be done by disregarding those elements in literature that distinguish good writing from bad. In the last resort, therefore, the literary historian stands or falls only in so far as he satisfies, or fails to satisfy, the literary critic. If the interpretation he proposes does not clarify

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1934. *English Poetry and the English Language: An Experiment in Literary History*, (Oxford: Clarendon) p.3.

<sup>7</sup> Leavis, ‘A Review’, p.96.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p.97.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p.96.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* As well as ‘radical’ Leavis refers on several occasions to Bateson’s argument as ‘not clear’ and ‘vague’. If there is a difficult tension between these concepts—of being radical whilst vague—it is likely to be because Leavis held a double criticism of Bateson, that being, that he had been *vague* and *not clear* in attempting to express his *radical* concept of literary history. Leavis, ‘A Review’, p.96-97.

the central and universal significance of the literature he is treating, it is worthless. His history may be excellent social history or economic history, but there is one thing it will not be: it will not be *literary* history.<sup>15</sup>

While Bateson's point was that his literary history must be literary-centric, with its focus on literature, Leavis disagreed that it was possible to evaluate the past (in its relation to *literature*) with a methodology exempt from the performance of critical decisions. Leavis notes, in a deprecating tone, that Bateson's 'history' 'looking round for something' that it could 'safely interpret'<sup>16</sup> (in order that such 'decisions'<sup>17</sup> may be seen as factual as opposed to 'critical') rather insufficiently 'settles'<sup>18</sup> on the 'history of words'<sup>19</sup> and the history of change in linguistic tendencies and poetic language. Leavis accounts for his rejection of linguistic analysis as a basis for a distinction between criticism and literary history by stating:

'Word' for [Bateson] is a simple term; 'denotation' and 'connotation' suffice for his perception of complexities (Dr Richards's 'paradigm on the fluctuations of the word *word*' would have come to him as an inhibiting revelation). But even with a more able analytic equipment he could not, except as a literary critic making a distinctively literary-critical approach, have written a more essentially *literary* history—a history, that is, unobnoxious to the consideration on which he dismisses the "social" and "economic".<sup>20</sup>

Leavis was highlighting a paradoxical element of Bateson's approach whereby research of social, linguistic, and economic contexts were undertaken with the proviso that the aim of such extrinsic investigation should be to guide the scholar toward a greater understanding of literature and of literary values. Leavis argued, however, that such extrinsic research—with its 'centre of interest'<sup>21</sup> and 'focus in literary values'<sup>22</sup>—must already assume certain literary values in order that a decision be made as to what aspects of history are important to the

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, F.R. Leavis quotes F.W. Bateson, *E.P.E.L.*, p.10.

<sup>16</sup> Leavis, 'A Review', p.97.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* See chapter 1 in which Bateson's argument on linguistic evolution is discussed: 'It is to words therefore, their history and science, that I invite the historian of poetry to turn. I suggest that poetry develops *pari passu* with the words it uses, that its history is a part of the general history of language, and that its changes of style and mood are merely the reflection of changing tendencies in the uses to which language is being put.' Bateson, *E.P.E.L.*, p.25.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

evaluative process. The only way such decisions about history and its relationship to literary work could be made, argued Leavis, was by critical ‘discrimination’<sup>23</sup> and an ‘eye for significance’.<sup>24</sup> With this Leavis made the claim that the very function of Bateson’s literary history (and the process of determining what is ‘valuable’<sup>25</sup> or ‘worth studying’)<sup>26</sup> could therefore ‘be successfully attempted only by a critic and would then be essentially literary criticism’.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, what is deemed important about the past, argued Leavis, would stem from a critical decision made from the values and perspectives of the ‘contemporary’,<sup>28</sup> ‘living’<sup>29</sup> and ‘present’<sup>30</sup> point in which the evaluation takes place.<sup>31</sup> The inversion of this argument also supported Leavis’s position in that he claimed any such ‘history’ would be undertaken ‘not because such works were published, had once perhaps a public, and are habitually referred to in histories of literature’,<sup>32</sup> but ‘because works of certain poets are judged to be of lasting value—of value in the present’.<sup>33</sup>

This far into Leavis’s review the issues of contention become apparent: Bateson believed literary history and criticism were distinct, arguing that they ‘do not even overlap’,<sup>34</sup> and that an objective approach to the study of literature could be achieved by an evaluative

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> F.R. Leavis, 2008. ‘A Rejoinder’, *Scrutiny*, IV, 1935-1936, (Cambridge: CUP) p.187.

<sup>26</sup> Leavis, ‘A Review’, p.98.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p.96. The rejection of Bateson’s separation on the basis it could be ‘successfully attempted only by a critic and would then be essentially literary criticism’ would become the leitmotif of Leavis’s attack throughout the exchanges of 1935 and would remain central to his position in 1953.

<sup>28</sup> Leavis, ‘A Review’, p.98.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p.97.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p.98.

<sup>31</sup> Josephine Guy and Ian Small view the basis of Leavis’s argument, as one ‘familiar in hermeneutics’, whereby, in similar terms, any understanding of the past, ‘because partial, is always a construction placed upon it’. Josephine Guy and Ian Small, 1993. *Politics and Value in English Studies: A Discipline in Crisis?*, (Cambridge: CUP) p.79. The strength of this refutation, which in effect, demonstrated Bateson’s argument as centrally comprising a hermeneutic impasse, was one of Leavis’s most effective attacks within the debate. I attend to it in more detail in chapters 4 and 5. I say most effective ‘direct’ attack, however, because some of the other key ways in which Leavis refuted Bateson were by means generally more dependent upon argumentative strategy and style of polemic, rather than outright disproving of his logic, as seen in this example. This also is discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>32</sup> Leavis, ‘A Review’, p.97.

<sup>33</sup> Leavis comments that a history of English poetry would in fact take place because the works are judged to have lasting value – value as identified in the present. This is a theme in Leavis’s writing that would emerge as the pioneering line of his *Revaluation* text several months later in 1936.

<sup>34</sup> F.W. Bateson, *E.P.E.L.*, p.3.



engagement with how a literary work was received in the time of its original composition and reception in history. Leavis argued the opposite; that criticism and literary history were not distinct, particularly not Bateson's type of history, and furthermore, that it was not merely preferable, but inevitable, that evaluation (even of past literature) was an activity inseparable from the contemporary 'living' values and sensibility of the modern world.

Exposing the tenuous line which *E.P.E.L.*'s mandate, were it achievable at all, would entirely depend, Leavis attends to the idea Bateson presents within that such a history could 'take account of changes in taste and fashion'<sup>35</sup> without confusing 'its business with that of a history of taste and fashion.'<sup>36</sup> For Leavis this was evidence that an implementation of Bateson's programme in actual practice was not possible.<sup>37</sup> If Bateson's literary historian made it his task to observe social and linguistic developments throughout history, argues Leavis, then his task would be no different from a social and linguistic history of language and trend: in which case it *would* be history, but not *literary* history. On the other hand, if Bateson's historian made the *literary* aspect of historical inquiry the guiding emphasis of his pursuit, then it *would* be literary, but it would not be objectively *historical* in that having perceived the past from the context of literary values and traditions it will have 'confused its business'<sup>38</sup> of historical assessment with literary assessment, and would therefore be literary criticism.

Leavis also makes the argument that if Bateson's history was, as Bateson would like it to be considered, void of the subjectivity that characterises judgements of criticism, then a history of poetry would be open to consideration of *all* texts and poetry without an initial

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<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> In his reply Bateson he would state that his thesis 'was entirely theoretical'. F.W. Bateson, 2008. 'A Reply', *Scrutiny, IV, 1935-1936*, (ed.) F.R. Leavis, (Cambridge: CUP) p.181. Prior to Bateson's caveat (its significance not entirely clear) Leavis is insistent within his review that the practical limitations of Bateson's method cannot be divorced from an assessment of its overall validity, theoretically, or otherwise.

<sup>38</sup> Leavis, 'A Review', p.97.

prejudice that would ‘determine and control’<sup>39</sup> what texts were ‘worth’<sup>40</sup> assessing in the first place. An example of what Leavis meant by this came in his rejoinder to Bateson’s reply in which Bateson had provided a short analysis of Dryden’s poetry. It was not Bateson’s analysis itself that Leavis questioned but rather how (and why) Bateson had arrived at the conclusion that the poetry of Dryden was worth evaluating. The implication was that Bateson had reached a judgement on the importance of Dryden’s poetry via a ‘critical estimation’<sup>41</sup> but that he had presented the nature of his decision on Dryden’s ‘worth’<sup>42</sup> as if it had been ‘determined’<sup>43</sup> by ‘fact accepted on authority’.<sup>44</sup> As no such authority existed in the realm of ‘*opinion*’<sup>45</sup> argued Leavis, so Bateson’s literary history was, unless it were to contradict itself by admitting to a fundamental dependence on criticism, devoid of a means of establishing a starting point of inclusion or exclusion when deciding what work is worthy of attention within analysis.<sup>46</sup>

This basis of this argument brought Leavis to his next charge against Bateson, which requires in order to be understood a presentation of Bateson’s view that:

The English poets are not suspended in a vacuum. They have relations and connexions both with each other and with the general life of their times, and it should be possible to illustrate and define those inter-connexions without falling into the verbose of inanities of “influences” and “tendencies.”<sup>47</sup>

In seeking to further demonstrate that Bateson’s history could not be separated from criticism, Leavis states:

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<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Leavis. ‘A Rejoinder’, p.186.

<sup>41</sup> Leavis. ‘A Rejoinder’, p.186.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Leavis, ‘A Review’, p.97.

<sup>44</sup> Leavis. ‘A Rejoinder’, p.186.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Decisions made as to what work one ‘proposes to deal with’ Leavis would add, would stem not from factually established criterion, but rather from existing pre-conceived, isomorphic, or culturally established ‘judgments of poetic value’. Leavis. ‘A Rejoinder’, p.186.

<sup>47</sup> It is of course natural that with Leavis’s reprinting of certain sections and extracts a certain degree of contextomy subverts the wider purpose of the ideological position. ‘Influences’ and ‘tendencies’ for example, though referred to here as verbose and inane, were important to Bateson, but their importance can be understood properly only via an understanding of their role in relation of his wider argument. For specific commentary on ‘influences’ and ‘tendencies’ in the context of the meaning intended in Bateson’s methodology see *E.P.E.L.* p. 3-5, 17, 45-46, 77, 121-123.

The 'illustrating' and 'defining,' one must add, will be part of a strictly critical process—a process of evaluating, and of bringing out the significance of what is judged to be valuable. The desiderated 'history' will be as much a work of criticism as a critique of a single poet is. ... Such a history, then, could be accomplished only by a writer interested in, and intelligent about, the present. It would, for one thing, be an attempt to establish a perspective, to determine what of English poetry of the past is, or ought to be, alive for us now.<sup>48</sup>

Leavis's paragraph emphasises that the processes of 'illustrating' and 'defining' were inherently critical processes, and as such Bateson's claim that they were central to literary history, meant that the methodological criterion of 'such a history'<sup>49</sup> would 'fundamentally'<sup>50</sup> rely and depend upon criticism. This was also evident, argued Leavis, in Bateson's 'grounds for omitting to consider'<sup>51</sup> the poetry of W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot on the basis that because Yeats and Eliot were not English, neither was their language 'exactly English'.<sup>52</sup> This type of judgement was 'a piece',<sup>53</sup> argued Leavis, with other 'essentially critical judgements'<sup>54</sup> made by Bateson in the guise of determinable and historical fact. As was Bateson's belief, added Leavis, that Houseman 'benefitted by language's gains in precision' in the twenty years before *A Shropshire Lad*.<sup>55</sup> This latter statement invoked contention in that Bateson had supported his claim on the basis that *A Shropshire Lad* had 'exactly those qualities of directness, concision, and inevitability that Hopkins's style just misses'.<sup>56</sup> While Leavis does not state whether he agrees or disagrees with Bateson's initial proposition—that Houseman 'benefitted by the language's gains'—he emphasises that the stylistic and aesthetic judgement on which the proposition is supported could not have been reached via a deferment to historical or linguistic fact, but rather by means of an opinion stemming from a comparative decision that must have been critical in nature. Despite the absence of Leavis's view on the

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<sup>48</sup> Leavis, 'A Review', p.98.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Leavis, 'A Review', p.98.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.* F.R. Leavis is quoting F.W. Bateson, *E.P.E.L.*, p.70.

<sup>53</sup> Leavis, 'A Review', p.98.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p.97.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, p.98.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*

poetry of Houseman in relation to the poetry of Hopkins, he does however take wider issue with the fact that Bateson's initial proposition stemmed from a preoccupation with 'linguistic flux'.<sup>57</sup> For Leavis, Bateson's acute engagement with what he called the 'changing and heterogeneous'<sup>58</sup> nature of literature, had served to 'confuse'<sup>59</sup> and 'misdirect'<sup>60</sup> his analytic attention away from more 'essential'<sup>61</sup> and 'important themes'<sup>62</sup> of consideration.

One such example can be seen in *E.P.E.L.* where Bateson makes the claim that the poetry of Thomson, Young, Gray, and Collins was indicative of a baroque style that became a feature of eighteenth century poetry. Bateson's observation of this led to his adjoining assertion that: 'The baroque style is rapid and inexact: it is rapid because inexact'.<sup>63</sup> Just as before, Leavis does not reprint Bateson's view on this matter in order to discuss the validity of its broader claim, but rather that such an observation misses the point of a more significant matter which should have been addressed instead. Leavis states:

Instead [Bateson] would notice that these poets represent a poetic tradition bearing a much less satisfactory relation to contemporary life than that borne either by the Metaphysical tradition or by the tradition that includes Pope and Johnson; and he would inquire how it was that so unsatisfactory a tradition came to prevail, making poets 'literary' and 'poetical' in pejorative senses of those terms.<sup>64</sup>

Leavis's argument here is that Bateson would have gained more by considering relationships of 'tradition'<sup>65</sup> within the eighteenth century as opposed to specific accounts of stylistic trend. The nature of this advice is similar to Leavis's following view that a more profitable

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<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, F.R. Leavis quotes F.W. Bateson, *E.P.E.L.* p.7.

<sup>58</sup> F.W. Bateson, *E.P.E.L.* p.7.

<sup>59</sup> Leavis, 'A Review', p.96.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, p.99.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, F.R. Leavis quotes F.W. Bateson, *E.P.E.L.*, p.77.

<sup>64</sup> Leavis, 'A Review', p.99. It is worth noting here that Leavis is able to apply such critical terms as 'satisfactory' and 'unsatisfactory' without contradicting himself. This is because, unlike Bateson's *E.P.E.L.*, Leavis has not explicitly suggested that the virtue of his approach is its neutral presentation of facts. While Leavis may *feel* and *believe* that what he is saying is correct, the epistemological paradox of Bateson's 'literary history' is that it does not, according to Leavis, possess the very objective characteristic upon which its own autotelic virtue and reason for being, ultimately depends in order for it to be 'distinct' from criticism.

<sup>65</sup> Leavis, 'A Review', p.99.

engagement could have (and should have) been achieved with regard to Bateson's commentary on nineteenth-century poetry. Leavis states:

In the nineteenth century [Bateson] would find himself considering similar problems: how came the Romantic tradition (on which, in its first phase, one's comment is that, though alive with the vitality of the age, it made so disappointing a use of the talents belonging to it) to result in a Victorian poetry so essentially turned away from the contemporary world and cut off from the sources of vitality?<sup>66</sup>

Again what can be seen in Leavis's review is a type of argument that engenders both condemnation presented in the form of a series of admonitions (that Bateson should been more aware of) and corrections presented in the form of advice (that Bateson's 'elementary training',<sup>67</sup> had seemingly failed to provide). The effect in terms of what this achieves for Leavis is also two-fold in that Leavis can be seen to simultaneously promote literature's capacity to harbour, reflect, and furthermore, shape, the vitality of the age,<sup>68</sup> while equally asserting that the importance of doing so is of greater extended value than the mere identification of differences that constitute Bateson's thesis.

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<sup>66</sup> Leavis, 'A Review', p.99-100.

<sup>67</sup> Leavis, 'A Review', p.96.

<sup>68</sup> It can be seen that the differences between Leavis and Bateson are evident in their opposing methodological directives. Hence, it can also be seen in both *E.P.E.L.* and Leavis's review that a significant connotative emphasis (and tension) surrounds the descriptors 'literary criticism' and 'literary history' and their associated (through contested) functions. However, when Leavis's issues with Bateson's thesis are collated and their arguments are examined, much appears to depend on an antithetical position they hold in relation to three types of sub-issue: (A) a best means of literary assessment, (B) a best means of understanding literature in relation to history, and (C) a best means of understanding history in so far as history (can be understood as) revealing and aiding a better understanding of literature. Though a circular problematic becomes evident in such a broad model, Bateson's position in relation to it can be seen in *E.P.E.L.* where he argues that in order to define a poetic style: 'What we must do is, first of all, to isolate the influence of the age on the theory and practice of the language, and secondly (but only secondly), when the linguistic tendencies have been defined, to examine their effect on the poetry.' Bateson, *E.P.E.L.*, p.vii. For Leavis if practice was to be profitable then Bateson's directive must be applied in reverse. Where Bateson argues that the 'influence of the age upon linguistic tendencies' was essential to the examination and understanding of words and by extension the poetry of the age, Leavis argued differently (as can be seen throughout his association with 'close reading'). Indeed, Leavis's argument was that, the age is to be understood via analysis of the words, then, the poetry, and from the poetry and the traditions of literature, the 'spirit of the age' can be observed. Later in the thesis it will be seen that due to Leavis's belief that literature held a capacity to imbue moral and cultural tradition, one of the values he placed on literature in the context of contemporary culture, was that it could help re-establish a morality in a vastly changing post-industrial age of modernisation and commercially profiteering capitalist and industry forces. For Leavis such forces, often associated with he called progressive-scientific and Neo-Benthamite cultural 'drive', were destroying domestic (sometimes noted as Christian) traditional moral values.

‘Angry’<sup>69</sup> at what he would later call the ‘pedantic’<sup>70</sup> ‘irritable’<sup>71</sup> attack and overall ‘misunderstanding’<sup>72</sup> of his essay, the Oxford scholar (as we will see in his reply) defends himself in strong terms. A contributing factor to the cause of Bateson’s anger is likely to have been Leavis’s highlighting of many examples where he felt it could be shown that Bateson had missed ‘essential themes’.<sup>73</sup> Where Bateson attends to the belief that Pre-Raphaelite poetry ‘had been made possible by the vagueness of Mid-Victorian English’;<sup>74</sup> Leavis states that the focus should have been on the relationship ‘between Victorian poetry and the English spoken in the age.’<sup>75</sup> Where Bateson states that Pre-Raphaelite poetry and its function disappeared when language became precise again; attention should have centred, in Leavis’s view, upon an explanation of ‘what this language was that became precise again (and by what agency)’.<sup>76</sup>

Toward its latter stages Leavis’s review extends to a brief comment upon several centuries all of which, he argues, would be misunderstood if explored by the limitations of Bateson’s literary history. The first example to which Leavis attends is Bateson’s claim that due to the constant importation of new words into Elizabethan society, the Elizabethans ‘had an uneasy feeling all the time that their vocabulary was slipping away from under them, and suspecting and distrusting it, they did not dare to confide the whole of their meaning to a single word or phrase.’<sup>77</sup> With this, Leavis stated he was in complete disagreement, arguing that: ‘who from a reading of the verse itself could bring away any other impression than that

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<sup>69</sup> Bateson, ‘Alternative to Scrutiny’, p.13.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, p.10

<sup>72</sup> Bateson, ‘A Reply’, p.181.

<sup>73</sup> Leavis, ‘A Review’, p.100.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, p.99.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, p.100.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, Leavis concludes by saying that these issues show ‘the essential themes – or what should have been such for Mr. Bateson, completely missed.’ Leavis, ‘A Review’, p.100.

<sup>77</sup> Leavis, ‘A Review’, p.98. F.R. Leavis quotes F.W. Bateson, *E.P.E.L.* p.31

the poets delight in their prolix fluency, and cultivate it for owns sake’?<sup>78</sup> Another example relates to Bateson’s view that that drama and the novel were ‘relatively impure forms of literature’<sup>79</sup> because their ‘*media*’ constituted a specific engagement with ideas as opposed to words. Whilst Leavis doesn’t challenge Bateson regarding the claim that impure language existed, he does argue that such ‘impurity’<sup>80</sup> had actually influenced the styles of the poets in a profitable way and that this type of observation—of linguistic (*literary*) pressures of the novel and play upon the poetry of the period—was precisely the kind which *should* have formed the ‘underlying preoccupation of Mr. Bateson’s ideal historian.’<sup>81</sup> Observing the ‘force’<sup>82</sup> of Leavis’s argument it may be said that the effect is achieved either by exposing the paradoxical elements of Bateson’s argument with a degree of manipulation or contextomy, which, as the fallacies are weaved out, imply that the only logical approach remaining is that of (as Leavis himself promotes) ‘present-centric’<sup>83</sup> and ‘lived’<sup>84</sup> literary analysis. Or, as an

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<sup>78</sup> Leavis, ‘A Review’, p.98. The issue here is not that of attempting to determine who is ‘correct’ between Leavis or Bateson. Rather the significant point to consider is that by holding a differing view to Bateson Leavis demonstrates that such views are subjective, and by implication, critical, as opposed to factual. That said it should be noted that disagreement in itself does not necessarily constitute evidence that something is subjective as opposed to factual. We may consider that if Leavis disagreed with a mathematician that  $2 + 2 = 4$  it would not appear to destabilise the justification of the mathematic equation in the same way. See Introduction (*fn.56*) and conclusion where I discuss the epistemological implications surrounding the study of literature as a discipline and field of knowledge. The surface point of expression, however, is equally significant: even if one were to argue that Leavis was accurate in his assessment that linguistic change provided ‘delight’ (and not ‘unease’) it may equally be argued that Leavis’s basis for such a claim is unjustified. He refutes Bateson the basis that no-one ‘could bring away’ a different view. What is evident from Bateson’s *E.P.E.L.* and the excerpt that Leavis reprinted was that Bateson brought away a different view, thus invalidating Leavis’s supporting logic (even if the supporting logic may be more accurately defined as merely the assumption upon which the ‘logic’ of assertion is expressed).

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, p.99.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.* Leavis speaks of ‘the advantages of the ‘impurity’ by which Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson, Tourneur and Middleton profited might be regained for poets—this should be the underlying preoccupation of Mr. Bateson’s ideal historian. Not that it be obtruded, or even explicit, anywhere. But it would direct and inform the eye with which the historian observed the changing conditions determining, from age to age, the use of genius and talent (in the foreground of the field of attention coming those that fall under the head of literary tradition—the current heritage of conventions, technical proclivities, habits of expression and approach...’ and as such, in failing to observe this, Bateson’s historian would thus in turn, fail to have indentified the development that ‘brought the full vitality of the age into poetry and produced a poetry representing a marvellous development of the language.’ Leavis ‘A Review’, p.99

<sup>81</sup> Leavis, ‘A Review’, p.98

<sup>82</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1964. ‘Alternative to *Scrutiny*’, *Essays in Criticism*, XIV, 1, 10-20. p.13.

<sup>83</sup> Tae Chul Kim refers to, and explains what he means by, the ‘present-centric’ nature of Leavis’s criticism, stating that: ‘Insofar as literature goes, [Leavis] argues, “a lack of interest in the present means usually an incapacity for any real interest ... in literature at all” (Education 130). He does not believe in “so much claiming permanent value” of great literature, for “inert concurrence in conventional valuations and reputations” gets “in

argument of better faith might entail; in exposing the fallacy of the ‘separation’ central to Bateson’s thesis, Leavis had simply brought to Oxford scholar’s attention several methodological and hermeneutic issues that he himself had more astutely considered in the process of arriving at his own method in the months and years earlier.<sup>85</sup> The latter, if it is the case, would thus appear to account for Leavis’s opening statement that, due to Bateson’s failure to realise these flaws within in his *E.P.E.L.* thesis, his performance proved ‘unprovided’, ‘unprepared’, and ‘unaware’.<sup>86</sup>

Leavis’s review, Bateson would go on to say, was ‘the most unfavourable the book received’.<sup>87</sup> ‘Disappointed not to have pleased Leavis’,<sup>88</sup> and ‘determined not to take his

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the way of life” (*Anti-Philosopher* 24). By his repeated assertion that English literature has “its reality and life (if at all) only in the present” or not at all, he does not mean only to see in new literary creation the “continuation and development” of the past literature, or rather “the decisive, the most significant, contemporary life of tradition,” but also to actualize the human meaning of the cultural past at the present stage of modernity (Sword 111 & 120, *Valuation* 130; *Revaluation* 9). If “life is growth” (*Valuation* 223), as he puts it, the signification of literature “in and of our time,” which is not necessarily the same as that in the original context, is performed in accordance with the age’s demand (Sword 23). It is exactly the case with the function of criticism in his project of modernity, when he says that criticism is “concerned with the life in the present of the literature of the past” (*Valuation* 283). Tae Chul Kim, 2004. ‘F.R. Leavis, or the Function of Criticism under Specialist Modernity’, *Journal of British and American Studies*, 10, 1, 81-112. p.95-96.

<sup>84</sup> By ‘lived’ criticism I refer to the type initially described by Leavis in *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* (1930). Leavis states: ‘The minority capable not only of appreciating Dante, Shakespeare, Donne, Baudelaire, Hardy (to take major instances) but of recognising their latest successors constitute the consciousness of the race (or a branch of it) at a given time. For such capacity does not belong merely to an isolated aesthetic realm; it implies responsiveness to theory as well as to art, to science and philosophy in so far as these may affect the sense of the human situation and of the nature of life. Upon this minority depends out power of profiting by the finest human experience of the past; they keep alive the subtlest and most perishable parts of a tradition. Upon them depend the implicit standards that order the finer living of an age, the sense that this is worth more than that, this rather than that is the direction in which to go, that centre is here rather than there. In keeping, to use a metaphor that is metonymy also and will bear a good deal of pondering, is the language, the changing idiom, upon which the living depends, and without which distinction of spirit is thwarted and incoherent.’ F.R. Leavis, 1930. *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture*, (Cambridge: Minority) p. 5-6. [Also reprinted in *For Continuity and Education and the University* (2nd edition: 1948)] in which case p. 14-15. This position Leavis would reformulate as ‘the living principle’ which I discuss in chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>85</sup> See chapter 1 where I have noted that although this argument was made in *New Bearings* it was also expressed in the editorial manifesto of *Scrutiny*’s first issue (1932), as well in Leavis’s introduction to *Towards Standards of Criticism* in 1933. The wider effectiveness of Leavis’s argument becomes apparent in that these admonitions lead to the critical conclusions that inform the approach Leavis set out to establish in *New Bearings* and the early critical doctrine of *Scrutiny* – that being, (to a large extent) a criticism that is intelligent about, and interested in, poetry that is ‘alive for us now’. Leavis, ‘A Review’, p.97.

<sup>86</sup> Leavis, ‘A Review’, p.96.

<sup>87</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1978. ‘Editorial Postscript: F.R.L and E in C: A Retrospect’, *Essays in Criticism*. XXVIII, 4, 353-361, p. 355. Also see Chapter one where it is detailed that Bateson requested permission to publicly defend Leavis’s negative review of *E.P.E.L.*, and for his response: ‘A Comment’ to be made ‘public’; that is, printed in *Scrutiny* in the journal’s following issue. Bateson, however, despite having later expressed an admiration for *Scrutiny* is equally noted to have ‘refused to allow the Corpus Christi College library to stock . . . or acquire the



displeasure lying down',<sup>89</sup> Bateson enquired as to how many words *Scrutiny* could spare for a retort. The reply from Leavis was that he could have 2,000 words and his response would appear in the following September issue. Bateson's carefully written<sup>90</sup> reply began by highlighting that Leavis's review raised a more significant issue than the particular merits or demerits of his *E.P.E.L.* thesis, that being; the nature of the relationship between literary history and literary criticism. Bateson writes:

I have devoted more than half my Introduction [of *E.P.E.L.*] to defining, or attempting to define, what I conceive to be the essential differences between the two activities. Dr. Leavis, however, will have none of this. If I understand him he will not allow that there can be any such thing as literary history. A literary history, he writes, 'could be successfully attempted only by a critic and would then be essentially literary criticism.'<sup>91</sup>

The reason Leavis's review was so negative, argued Bateson, was that he did not properly understand the differences between criticism and literary history as explained in *E.P.E.L.* With this belief set out the objective of Bateson's reply was to 'state the case for literary history in different and more concrete terms'.<sup>92</sup> Bateson began the reply by providing an assertion with which he hoped Leavis would agree: 'that the majority of propositions about literature, other than mere statements of fact, can be subsumed in a final analysis under two types.'<sup>93</sup> He continues:

The formula for type I, a simple example of which would be Dryden's tribute to Waller ('Unless he had written, none of us could write'), might be 'A derives from B.' And similarly Type II, which is exemplified by Arnold's dictum that 'The best of Addison's composition (the "Coverley Papers" in the *Spectator*, for example, wears

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reprint edition of *Scrutiny*. Valentine Cunningham, 1979. 'F.W. Bateson: Scholar, Critic, and Scholar-Critic', *Essays in Criticism*, XXIX, 2, 139-155, p. 145.

<sup>88</sup> Bateson, Editorial Postscript: F.R.L and E in C: A Retrospect', p.355.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> In reflecting on the writing of his reply, Bateson recalls: 'I seem to remember taking a good deal of trouble with those two thousand words'. The reason being, that Bateson was adamant to prove his thesis valid by re-stating its proposal in clear (and as close to irrefutable terms) as possible within 2000 words. F.W. Bateson, 1964. 'Alternative to *Scrutiny*, *Essays in Criticism*, XIV, 1, 10-20. p.13.

<sup>91</sup> Bateson, 'A Reply', p.181.

<sup>92</sup> Despite the conciliatory tone of Bateson's reply (his aim initially was to please Leavis); in re-stating his case for the distinction between criticism and literary history, he would claim that it was now to prove Leavis 'demonstrably wrong'. Bateson, 'A Reply', p.181.

<sup>93</sup> Bateson, 'A Reply', p.181.

better than the best of Pope's,' could be reduced to 'A is better than B,' or even just 'A is good.'<sup>94</sup>

For Bateson 'Type I' constituted 'literary history', whereas 'Type II', 'literary criticism'. But these 'labels', he argued, were less important than the 'realization that the two types of proposition represent two different orders of truth.'<sup>95</sup> The proposal of Type I, that A *derives* from B, naturally must extend to – 'and I can prove it.'<sup>96</sup> Via examining parallel literary passages, Bateson argued, sufficient evidence of derivation and influence could be identified as 'proof', and thus, in turn, that proof would constitute 'fact'<sup>97</sup>—the principal component of literary history. The statement of type 2, however, that A is *better* than B, was different in that it 'merely'<sup>98</sup> represented a statement of '*opinion*'.<sup>99</sup> Stating that such 'analysis can be taken a step further' Bateson states:

A critical judgment, such as that cited from Arnold, is the expression of an immediate intuition. In its entirety it is necessarily inexplicable and incommunicable. Arnold, if one comes to think of it, was comparing the total impression made on him by years of familiarity with Addison's prose not only with the analogous impression he had of Pope's verse but also with his more diffused feeling of what in general constitutes good writing. And the half-conscious balancing of all these impressions against each other *resulted* in the dictum.<sup>100</sup>

Bateson's argument is that the process through which Arnold arrived at his judgement is unavailable for all in that in order to assent to such a judgement (that exact judgement of Arnold's) we would have to read Addison and Pope in precisely the same way, and against precisely the same literary experience, background, and criterion, as Arnold himself. When discussing the nature of the critical function—such as the example here of a critical judgement made by Arnold—Bateson raises the inherency of the subjective (or relativist)

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<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> A precise understanding of what Bateson means by 'fact' (the epistemological entity in a literary context) can be seen in his definition, that 'fact[:] Its truth or falsehood can be tested by a simple examination of relevant evidence, e.g. that provided by parallel passages, just as a fact is tested in a court of law.' Bateson, 'A Reply', p.182.

<sup>98</sup> Bateson, 'A Reply', p.182.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*, '*Opinion*' for Bateson (his italics) constituted a different order of judgement than 'factual' judgements that were 'proof'-based or evidentially-supported. As with the problematic (oxymoron) of 'objective opinion', the semantic and logical implication of the term 'factual judgement' is examined further in the conclusion.

<sup>100</sup> Bateson, 'A Reply', p.182.

problematic: that individual readers approach a phenomenological viewpoint from the shape of their own experience.<sup>101</sup> By distinction however, when discussing the function of the literary historian the issue of subjective '*opinion*' is not perceived as a concern or inherent feature of the process. Indeed, 'for the literary historian' argues Bateson, 'life is much simpler',<sup>102</sup> and simpler because:

A historical thesis, such as Dryden's remark already quoted, either proves or disproves itself. The historian has simply to present his reader with the evidence upon which he has himself based his conclusion, and if the evidence proves to be trustworthy and adequate his reader can have no alternative except to concur in it.<sup>103</sup>

From this is it clear to see why, in seeking to establish an objectively positivist approach to the study of literature, Bateson perceives the facticity of literary history as preferable over the subjective nature of criticism. Having outlined his position Bateson returns his attention to Leavis's 'demonstrably wrong',<sup>104</sup> belief that literary history is essentially literary criticism. In his attempt to disprove this Bateson argues that 'Dr. Leavis's paradox can mean three different things':<sup>105</sup>

He may mean: (1) that a historical proposition ('Pope derives from Dryden') is indistinguishable from a critical proposition ('Pope is better than Dryden'); or (2) that

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<sup>101</sup> Bateson's argument here is that due to the subjective nature of 'critical' judgements of literature, such judgements can only at best amount to a concept of values rather a fact or universally accepted truth. Bateson sees this as problematic. While Bateson is correct in saying this is problematic for the discipline (hence the importance he bestows on the corrective properties of factual scholarship) to term it as a 'problem' is inaccurate if by extension 'problem' presupposes the possibility of resolution. A resolution would require the presence of what—in the interpretational 'critical' domain of literature—is ontologically elusive; that being, as stated: a means to validate a method or interpretation as correct. The subjective or 'individualising' nature of criticism then, as distinct from the law-like nomothetic domain of, say, the natural sciences, thus encounters an impasse which may be understood most accurately as a condition that is immanent. The shift, however, from calling subjectivity a 'problem' to calling it a 'condition' does not in itself assail the implications the impasse has upon the critical act as a discipline in which principles of criterion and standards of practice are sought. Ultimately it is for these reasons that Bateson seeks a method conducive to 'fact' in the belief that 'fact' can determine 'authority'. In chapter 5 and the conclusion I will further explore the argument that wider attempts made throughout twentieth-century discourse to unify or calibrate critical perceptions of literary merit and methods of analysis result consistently in the type of conflict amongst critics and theorists which can be seen to emerge here in Bateson's reply to Leavis.

<sup>102</sup> Bateson, 'A Reply', p.182.

<sup>103</sup> The only thing Bateson says by way of admonition regarding his historical method is that its function requires mutually accepted rules of evidence. Such evidence can adduced from 'fact' (see *fn.83*) which in turn can be adduced by the comparative exercise of observing, simultaneously, the literary text, and the biographical, political, or social history surrounding it.

<sup>104</sup> Bateson, 'A Reply', p.181.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.* By 'Dr. Leavis's paradox' Bateson was referring to what he deemed to be Leavis's paradoxical belief that that literary history *was* literary criticism.

a historical proposition is just not worth making; or (3) that historical propositions are of subsidiary importance and can be taken by the critics in their stride. But (1) is nonsense and the strict application of (2) would make any continuous survey of literature an impossibility. It is (3) therefore that Dr. Leavis probably intends, and (3) has a certain plausibility.<sup>106</sup>

For Bateson, while ‘historians may be subordinate to the critic’,<sup>107</sup> it was important to recognise that without the work of the historian critics like Leavis would be without texts, without dates, and ‘without half the *data* out of which their judgements emerge.’<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, he added, ‘only a very exceptional critic’<sup>109</sup> could himself do the work of the historian because the skills required are distinct from those skills required in criticism. The skills—‘the *desiderata*’<sup>110</sup>—of criticism are, noted Bateson: ‘Taste, literary skill, a certain self-confidence, and finally a strong urge to impose order in the chaos of contemporary opinion.’<sup>111</sup> By distinction the literary historian required ‘the more prosaic virtues of curiosity, learning, patience and accuracy.’<sup>112</sup> Despite most likely being aware that Leavis would retaliate,<sup>113</sup> Bateson nevertheless used this presentation of distinguishing skill-sets to tell Leavis that he felt him to be devoid of those necessary to the practice of literary history.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Bateson, ‘A Reply’, p.182. Observation of Bateson’s style of argumentation will identify a tendency to provide logical breakdowns comprising clearly numbered distinctions. While in the case of his reply to Leavis this may seen as an attempt to ensure clarity given Leavis’s claims that his argument in *E.P.E.L.* was ‘not clear’, it may also be noted that similar numerical breakdowns were used throughout *E.P.E.L.* to explain certain points prior to Leavis’s accusation that he was ‘not clear’ and even later (in 1953) Leavis’s accusation that Bateson was guilty of obscurantism.

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*, p.183.

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> The possibility that Bateson knew Leavis would retaliate if charged with lacking skills increases in direct relation to how well Bateson was acquainted with Leavis’s other clashes in the correspondence section of *Scrutiny*. I detail this in more detail as it becomes evident in the tensions surrounding the second phase of the debate, but it is worth noting that prior to Bateson’s reply (1935) accusations of incompetence (either directed to himself personally or more widely at the *Scrutiny* journal) were met with “neurotic,” “petty,” “authoritarian,” [and] “impossibly haughty,” responses from Leavis. Paul Dean, 1996. ‘The Last Critic? The Importance of F.R. Leavis’, *The New Criterion*, 14, 1, 28-35. p.28.

<sup>114</sup> This in effect ended what had thus far been a rather conciliatory tone of dispute from Bateson’s side. However, the repercussive significance of the attack becomes evident when Leavis, in his rejoinder, remarks that the comment caused him particular offence. Henceforth the tone of Leavis’s attacks on Bateson increased in

Stating that *Scrutiny* was the right place to discuss the failings of eminent critics Bateson argues that T.S. Eliot's *Sacred Wood* (1921) although a generally 'good'<sup>115</sup> book, demonstrated precisely the type of 'indifference'<sup>116</sup> to scholarship which gave it a certain 'regrettable capriciousness'.<sup>117</sup> In an effort to expose the consequences of neglecting scholarship in literary evaluation, Bateson writes of Eliot:

Some of his observations are reckless almost to a point of impudence. I must content myself with one example, selected almost at random, from 'Some Notes on the Blank Verse of Christopher Marlowe':

'The rapid long sentence, running line into line . . . marks the certain escape of blank verse from the rhymed couplet, and from the elegiac or rather pastoral note of Surrey, to which Tennyson returned. If you contrast these two soliloquies with the verse of Marlowe's greatest contemporary, Kyd—by no means a despicable versifier—you see the importance of the innovation:

The one took sanctuary, and, being sent for out,  
Was murdered in Southwark as he passed  
To Greenwich, where the Lord Protector lay.  
Black Will was burned in Flushing on a stage;  
Green was hanged at Osbridge in Kent . . .

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which is not really inferior to:

So these four abode  
Within one house together; and as years  
Went forward, Mary took another mate;  
But Dora lived unmarried till her death.  
(Tennyson, *Dora*).'

For several reasons, argued Bateson, a scholar would reject Eliot's reading of Kyd and Tennyson.<sup>119</sup> First, 'he would want to know what was meant by Tennyson's 'return' to

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their pejorative contempt. Furthermore, this method of aggravating Leavis was also used by Bateson in 1953, and as I detail in chapter 3 can be seen as contributing a degree of personal antagonism within the discourse.

<sup>115</sup> Bateson, 'A Reply', p.184.

<sup>116</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> See (*fn.124*)

<sup>119</sup> Bateson would elaborate his criticism of Eliot on this matter thirty-seven years later. See the attack in which Leavis is also mentioned in a footnote of on p.21. F.W. Bateson, 1972. *Scholar Critic*, (London: Routledge & Kegan and Paul). p.19-22.

Surrey.’<sup>120</sup> For Bateson, Eliot’s ‘reckless’ equating of Tennyson’s style with Surrey’s evidenced a failure to identify that ‘Tennyson’s blank verse, though less varied than Marlowe’s, is not end-stopped like Surrey’s’,<sup>121</sup> and furthermore, would that Tennyson’s use of the ‘long sentence’<sup>122</sup> wasn’t merely a point of difference, but rather a ‘prominent’ and central ‘feature’ of distinction.<sup>123</sup> In addition, says Bateson, a scholar would protest Eliot’s ‘unqualified attribution of *Arden of Feversham* (from which Mr. Eliot’s quotation comes) to Kyd.’<sup>124</sup> Indeed, due to Eliot’s lack of scholarly concern for accuracy<sup>125</sup> he appears unaware that such an ‘attribution is still entirely conjectural.’<sup>126</sup> It was also, in Bateson’s view, a failure of Eliot’s criticism to claim that Kyd was ‘Marlowe’s greatest contemporary.’<sup>127</sup> It wasn’t the nature of the judgement *per se* that Bateson was calling into question (for he knew criticism was essentially ‘*opinion*’<sup>128</sup>) but rather Eliot’s potential oversight of the ‘fact’ that ‘Shakespeare was born in the same year as Marlowe’.<sup>129</sup> Indeed, unless Eliot was of the view that Kyd was ‘greater’ therefore, than Shakespeare, then his own statement would be in contradiction to his own critical values, and it would have been an error born out neglect of scholarly consideration of history. An even more serious problem with Eliot’s reading, according to Bateson, was that of failing to identify the difference between ‘the deliberate naïvety of Tennyson’s *Dora*’ and ‘the artlessness of *Arden*.’<sup>130</sup> Again, if he had been more scholarly in his criticism, Eliot would have known that ‘Tennyson’s poem (which Mr. Eliot

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<sup>120</sup> Bateson, ‘A Reply’, p.185.

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> Bateson highlights the fact that in ‘Some Notes on the Blank Verse of Christopher Marlowe’ Eliot does not source the first stanza. He does attribute it to Kyd, but under where the stanza is printed there is no author/title as there is under the stanza from Tennyson’s *Dora*. See (fn.118) for place of omission.

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *ibid.*

incidentally misquotes) is a clever, if hollow, pastiche of Wordsworth'.<sup>131</sup> Eliot's claim then that Tennyson's stanza is not really inferior to the crude metrical prose of the Elizabethan dramatist is about 'as helpful', states Bateson, 'as saying that chalk is not really inferior to cheese.'<sup>132</sup> The wider effect of Bateson's attack, however, can be seen in that it demonstrated to Leavis, that in refusing to acknowledge the distinct properties (and value) of scholarly engagement, such critical oversight could occur in his own criticism just as it evidently had in even the best of Eliot's critical work.<sup>133</sup>

With his point made, Bateson moved toward his conclusion by stating that while scholarship was distinct from criticism due to its ability to attend to those issues raised above, his argument should not be understood as one proposing a 'total divorce',<sup>134</sup> of the two activities.<sup>135</sup> Indeed his argument was of the contrary that both *suffered* from an ignorance and suspicion of each other. His reason for writing *E.P.E.L.*, he reflected, was to 'bridge the gulf between them',<sup>136</sup> by showing critics that a scholar 'could be aware of their problems',<sup>137</sup> whilst at the same, highlighting that the scholarly approach must be 'different from theirs':<sup>138</sup> 'What I desiderate is not a deletion of the frontiers between the two professions but a more intimate co-operation between them.'<sup>139</sup> Leavis's review of his book, he admits, may have, at

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<sup>131</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> Leavis, however, would provide the caveat that while he 'admired' Eliot's criticism, it would be wrong for Bateson to imply that its type was identical to Eliot's and therefore equally guilty of any such 'failings'. In discussing Eliot's influence on his own critical practice, Leavis would later add, that although he admired Eliot, that didn't make him a 'follower' of Eliot—' (The suggestion that I am one must, I think, be as surprising to him as it is to me.)' 'To call me a follower of Dr. Johnson and Matthew Arnold and D.H. Lawrence, critics with whom I find myself much more in sympathy, would be less misleading.' F.R. Leavis, 1951. 'The Legacy of the "Twenties"', *The Listener*, 29, 3, 495-505. p.502-3

<sup>134</sup> Bateson, 'A Reply', p.183.

<sup>135</sup> Bateson's conclusion which advocates an 'intimate co-operation' of criticism and literary history, offers in its final analysis, a similar proposal of balance to that which Bateson would also raise in his 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' essay of 1953. On both occasions, Bateson would promote the importance of balance (acknowledging that in doing so his proposal may come as a surprise to some). That such isolation between the activities of criticism and history had occurred in the public-academic sphere, Bateson evidenced by asking: 'How many of the subscribers to *Scrutiny* and *The Criterion* are also readers of the Review of English Studies and the Modern Language Review?' Bateson, 'A Reply', p.184.

<sup>136</sup> Bateson, 'A Reply', p.183.

<sup>137</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> Bateson, 'A Reply', p.184.

most, highlighted that it was, in places, a little ‘presumptuous’,<sup>140</sup> but that the argument was correct and important, Bateson remained certain. Certain that: ‘our critics *ought* to be more scholarly and our scholars more critical. This, however, was not achievable by merely conflating criticism and scholarship together and ‘pretending’,<sup>141</sup> as ‘Dr. Leavis’ was inclined, that they were one and ‘the same thing.’<sup>142</sup> Bateson concludes on a somewhat triumphant note with a final re-statement to this effect, by writing:

My moral is, I trust, fairly obvious. Literary history and literary criticism both have a perfectly good right to exist, and each can learn something from the other. If Dr. Leavis will try and persuade his fellow critics to adopt a somewhat less arrogant attitude towards scholarship, I will see if I can induce some of our scholars to think less harshly of him—and perhaps even to read his books.<sup>143</sup>

Leavis begins his rejoinder by stating:

I did not intend to give Mr. Bateson any excuse for supposing that I despise scholarship and I am very sorry if I have given him any. I intended to criticize his scholarship for being incomplete; to insist that it was inadequate for his undertaking because (a) it relied fundamentally upon such concepts as ‘word’ and ‘language’ without, apparently, any realization of the difficulty or any acquaintance with the relevant analysis, and (b) it was insufficiently informed and guided by criticism.<sup>144</sup>

Bateson’s defence was inadequate in Leavis’s opinion. Inadequate because, as he had stated in his initial review, ‘the kind of history that *he* undertakes, could be successfully attempted only by a critic and would then be essentially criticism.’<sup>145</sup> Leavis wished to make clear that his objection to ‘Bateson’s type of history’ was not of the ‘generality that Mr. Bateson imputes’: as an attack on the possibility that literary history could exist at all. Leavis writes:

I have no doubt at all that there may be histories consisting, in so far as they have any use, of mere statements of fact about works of literature—works the assumed values of which the historian takes as fact too, without asking how it came to be fact.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> *ibid.*, p.185.

<sup>144</sup> Leavis. ‘A Rejoinder’, p.186.

<sup>145</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> *ibid.*



Leavis's remark, 'in so far as they have any use' 'slipped in' he states, because he knows of no history, that when the judgements within are assessed 'doesn't make a show of criticism'.<sup>147</sup> Leavis's view on this matter is also seen in his argument that 'any history that deals in influences is committed to criticism—as Mr. Bateson, in his own way, is committed.'<sup>148</sup> The point here, and that which may be understood as the central point of Leavis's rejoinder, was that Bateson's 'radical distinction'<sup>149</sup> comprises, at its core, a view that scholarship is defined by an engagement and interest in 'fact',<sup>150</sup> whereas criticism, an engagement and interest in 'opinion'.<sup>151</sup> This was not acceptable to Leavis, and he made his case accordingly:

The distinction that he reduces to the difference between fact and opinion, seems to me extraordinarily uncritical (I hope he won't think this begging the question). What is this 'fact' of the 'dependence' of Dryden's poetry on Waller's? I should like to see by what 'sober-evidence weighing' Mr. Bateson would set out to establish it. The only evidence he specifies is 'that provided by parallel passages'—by which, indeed, Dryden can be proved to have read Waller just as he can be proved to have read Cowley and Milton. But the most sober weighing can go no further, except in terms of critical judgments of a most complex and delicate order.<sup>152</sup>

Leavis argues that Bateson's theory stems from an 'absurdly simple notion'<sup>153</sup> of what criticism is, that being, that critics simply invoke judgements such as 'this is good or bad'.<sup>154</sup> In observing the first of two related points Leavis makes in regard to this over-simplified notion, Leavis states:

Mr. Bateson as a literary historian can have access to the works he proposes to deal with—to his most essential facts—only if he is sufficiently a critic; only by an appropriate and discriminating response to them; a response, that is, involving the kind of activity that produces value-judgments. And these judgments are not, in so far as they are real, expressions of opinion on facts than can be possessed and handled neutrally (so to speak).<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> Leavis, 'A Review', p.98.

<sup>150</sup> Leavis, 'A Rejoinder', p.186.

<sup>151</sup> Leavis, 'A Review', p.97.

<sup>152</sup> Leavis, 'A Rejoinder', p.186.

<sup>153</sup> *ibid.*, p.187.

<sup>154</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *ibid.*

The argument presented by Leavis here is one of dialectical return in that he assumes reason in what he believes to be Bateson's straw-man so as to show that if such a claim *were* true—that that criticism was merely about 'value',<sup>156</sup> judgements—then it would be true also of literary history, because literary history depended on the same type of judgements as criticism. The second aspect of Leavis's response sees him express that he 'deplores Mr. Bateson's attitude because it encourages a lazy notion of criticism.'<sup>157</sup>

The critic should be at least as arduously concerned for 'fact' as the scholar; not merely because he should pay due attention to the relevant facts of scholarship, but because he should be controlled by the determination to justify his treating as a fact of the public world something that cannot be tripped over, passed from hand to hand, brought into a laboratory, or, in any literal sense, pointed to.<sup>158</sup>

In order then, Leavis suggests, for the critic to justify his 'opinion' and set it into the public world-sphere as a type of non-nomothetic 'fact', the judgement and the process by which the judgement is arrived at must be a process extraordinarily critical itself; critical in the sense that it precludes a consciousness of its own responsibility. The method Leavis proposes to achieve this (rather metaphysical) doctrine of self-aware critical responsibility sees him produce a list that correlates to (and corrects) the parallel passage in Bateson's reply where Bateson listed the performative qualities of criticism and scholarship in order to demonstrate that their skill-sets, and as such, their functions, were distinct. Where Bateson had argued that the essential 'qualifications'<sup>159</sup> of a critic must be (as I have discussed above): 'Taste, literary skill, a certain self-confidence, and finally an imperious urge to impose order upon the chaos of contemporary opinion', Leavis argued that critic should assume a state of 'not self-confidence, but cultivated self-mistrust; not assertiveness, but disciplined and strenuous humility and docility.'<sup>160</sup> These qualitative features of criticism, Leavis notes, pre-suppose a

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<sup>156</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> Bateson, 'A Reply', p.183.

<sup>160</sup> Leavis. 'A Rejoinder', p.187.

dependence on the virtues of, ‘curiosity’, ‘patience’ and ‘accuracy’.<sup>161</sup> What can be seen is that these terms are direct quotations from what Bateson deemed essential to the *literary historian*. As such Leavis can be seen to make the point that the qualities Bateson claimed were fundamental to the literary historian, were fundamental also to the skills of the literary critic, thereby again dissolving the construct of Bateson’s ‘separation’ between the functions. Leavis’s moves toward his conclusion by stating that he was aware of shortcomings in some of Eliot’s criticism (particularly the passage Bateson had analysed), however he was of little doubt that Eliot would observe Bateson’s response, as it stood, as combining ‘pedantry with inaccuracy’.<sup>162</sup> ‘And as for Mr. Bateson’s book, I did not think it necessary to say in my review (what I say now) that I found it well worth disagreeing with and that I was grateful for the opportunity’<sup>163</sup> to do so.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> *ibid.*, See (fn.133)

<sup>163</sup> Leavis. ‘A Rejoinder’, p.187.

<sup>164</sup> The debate of 1935 would, in *Scrutiny* at least, draw to a close at this point. The issues contested in the debate, however, would permeate throughout several published works in the following period. The first to note of these was Leavis’s *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (1936). Though *Revaluation* constructs its own posc re, as distinct from the issues of the debate *per se*, many significant parallels nevertheless can be identified between it and *New Bearings* four years earlier. Leavis argued that an effort should be made to differentiate or distinguish authors whose work was still ‘living’ and therefore representative of the tradition of ‘culture’ that descended from Shakespeare. This concept had previously been introduced by Leavis when in *New Bearings* he expressed a belief that ‘certain key figures represented the Shakespearean tradition but in the nineteenth century, poetry became the vehicle for an escape into a dream world.’ Richard Storer, 2009. *F.R. Leavis*, (London: Routledge) p.83. *Revaluation*’s preoccupation with the culture of influence can be seen, certainly in a synoptic sense, in the attempts it makes to distinguish literary styles, lines of influence, and of course, traditions throughout literary history. Though this is achieved on a level gauge-able only through a reading of the text, it is worth noting that all judgements within *Revaluation* stem from explicit value judgements made by Leavis. While this is not uncommon, it fails as a methodology in overturning the inevitable subjective mechanism of critical performance, the very concern Bateson held with Leavis. In this sense, even *Revaluation* which was a text more influential and identifiable than the Leavis-Bateson debate itself pivots on the meta-critical inquiries of Leavis’s clash with Bateson. In simple terms this means that Leavis’s judgements about what work is worthy of merit, and what work has provided influence or impact upon wider literature, stems from a source, and that source; is his own critical standards. Later, when writing ‘Retrospect of a Decade’ (1940) Leavis felt the significant achievement of *Scrutiny* was, in many ways, evident in its mission and therefore seen through its success in achieving its aims. But as Leavis asks Bateson, ‘What are these facts?’ the same must be applied in question of Leavis, ‘What is this intelligent criticism?’. This specifically is Bateson’s central attack. In ‘Retrospect of a Decade’ Leavis makes no reference to his debate with Bateson. What can be found though is the statement from Leavis that: ‘there is one aspect of the unfavourable state of civilization that especially concerns *Scrutiny* and its specific function. In all ages, no doubt, there have been cliques and coteries, and young writers have founded mutual-admiration societies and done their best to make these coincident with the literary world—the world that determines current valuations. F.R. Leavis, 1940. ‘Retrospect of a Decade’ *Scrutiny*, IX, I, 70-72. p.71. In this sense, while not directly acknowledging Bateson, Leavis situates his philosophy (and its committed focus upon contemporary or ‘current valuations’) in direct opposition to Bateson. Between Leavis’s ‘Retrospect of a Decade’ and ‘*Scrutiny*: After Ten years’ published

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two years later in 1942, Bateson had completed the editing of his *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* (1940). The theoretical friction with Leavis is maintained due to the type of criticism (scholarship) that the Cambridge bibliography offered. This was very much the collection of 'dates, figures, names,' etc. that Leavis, within the 1935 debate, had stated were an insufficient guiding-tool of criticism, and yet depending as they do upon critical judgements made from the perspective of the present about the past, were inseparable from criticism. See (fn. 42). In 'After Ten Years: Editorial' (1942) Leavis would again state this belief, expressing also that he sought to bring together concerns of culture and art with the 'contemporary civilization', and furthermore, that he viewed the 'university' as the setting by which such a responsibility rests. F.R. Leavis, 1942. 'After Ten Years: Editorial', *Scrutiny*, IX, 4, 326-239. p.327. His assessment of *Scrutiny*'s efforts in representing this ideology and propagandizing it throughout the educational and academic worlds was that it could influence a university setting. It would thus form the focus of his *Education and the University* written and published the following year in 1943.

### CHAPTER THREE: THE LEAVIS-BATESON DEBATE: THE 1953 EXCHANGES

Bateson's essay that outlined the mandate for his Oxford journal *Essays in Criticism* is a good place to begin an understanding of the exchanges between Leavis and Bateson in 1953. And a useful point of departure is to consider Richard Storer's view that behind Bateson's essay and the ensuing exchanges:

Was a battle between the old and the new journal over which could rightfully claim to be in the Arnoldian tradition ('Essays in Criticism' and 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' were the titles of well-known works by Arnold). The traditional rivalry between Oxford and Cambridge perhaps also played a part, although both Bateson and Leavis regarded themselves as outsiders in their respective establishments.<sup>1</sup>

The excerpt from Storer comprises two main observations; the first being that both journals sought above the other the claim of being a more authentic representation of the critical ideology of Matthew Arnold. The second observation of Storer's suggests that a duality or uncertainty exists in relation to how much the debate can be seen as an extension of Oxford-Cambridge rivalry. Starting with the latter claim it may be said that certain elements of the critical values and approaches contested by Leavis and Bateson were rooted, in part, in the critical traditions and ideologies of their respective universities. But Storer's caveat that they were both 'outsiders' is a well documented sentiment.<sup>2</sup> With regards to Leavis, I have noted this in the first chapter, and refer here to his statement that the literary-critical ideology of *Scrutiny* represented, 'the essential Cambridge in spite of Cambridge'.<sup>3</sup> Records of Bateson's relationship with his employers and colleagues at Oxford indicate a similar type of unease to

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Storer, 2009. *F.R. Leavis*, (London: Routledge) p.91-92.

<sup>2</sup> Beyond Storer, several other critics also regarded both Leavis and Bateson as 'outsiders' in their relation to their respective universities. As this is commonly present in accounts of both men, I will two other examples: Valentine Cunningham (who knew Bateson) stated that 'his voice was always a dissenting one, from outside'. Valentine Cunningham, 1979. 'F.W. Bateson: Scholar, Critic, and Scholar-Critic', *Essays in Criticism*, XXIX, 2, 139-155. p.149. And Graham Martin states 'Bateson was as much an outsider to his English Faculty as Leavis to his'. Graham Martin, 1996. 'F.R. Leavis and the Function of Criticism', *Essays in Criticism*, XLVI, 1, 1-15. p.2.

<sup>3</sup> Ian Mackillop, 1997. *F.R. Leavis: A Life in Criticism* (London: Penguin) p.142.

that which had existed, as MacKillop suggests, between Cambridge and Leavis. Bateson would recollect in an 'Editorial Commentary' in 1965 the following memory of *Essay in Criticism*'s reception at Oxford:

I remember breaking the news of our project to F.P. Wilson, a kindly scholar who was then the Merton Professor of English Literature. 'You must make it absolutely clear,' he insisted, 'that your journal has not received any official blessing whatever.' I think he was perhaps a little surprised at the degree of enthusiasm with which I accepted the limitation. 'We don't want an official blessing,' I assured him, 'what *would* be nice would be an official curse.' Of course, Oxford being Oxford, the curse if there was one, was only pronounced *sotto voce*.<sup>4</sup>

Bateson's 'outsider' attitude and character and his personal and ideological relationship with the English Faculty at Oxford form a central focus of Valentine Cunningham's essay 'F.W. Bateson: Scholar, Critic, and Scholar-Critic' (1979). Cunningham writes that *Essays in Criticism* 'was founded because [Bateson] had let the Oxford English School down for too long' . . . [his] voice had always been a dissenting one'—both 'zestily irresponsible as well as dutifully responsible' . . . he 'made no bones about what rankled him, nor about the amount of himself he had invested in his choosing to live as a scholar-critic in Oxford.'<sup>5</sup> But Cunningham also notes that Bateson 'craved acceptance from the system he scorned',<sup>6</sup> a similar type of contradiction that Leavis harboured with regard to Cambridge as suggested by his disappointment at not receiving tenureship in 1931. The point here is that a certain animosity (particularly in their early careers) had led to a feeling in both men of only partial personal and ideological loyalty to their respective institutions. As such whilst *Essays in Criticism* was founded by Bateson at Oxford, and *Scrutiny*, by Leavis at Cambridge, care must be taken to avoid associating the ideology of either men, or indeed the journals they

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<sup>4</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1965. 'Editorial Commentary: The Second Breath', *Essays in Criticism*, XV, 1, 1-5, p.1.

<sup>5</sup> Cunningham, p.147.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

edited, as completely representative of their universities, or the prominent critical-ideological positions their universities held.<sup>7</sup>

If a less than perfect relationship with their institutions was shared by Leavis and Bateson, another similarity it can be said, and that of Storer's second point, was the respect they held for the critical philosophy of Matthew Arnold. Bateson begins 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' (1953) by outlining what he terms as his essays 'real concerns':<sup>8</sup>

MY title, it will be seen, repeats that of a well-known essay of Matthew Arnold's. In what is intended to be an editorial pronouncement on *Essays in Criticism's* point of view and programme it seemed appropriate to invoke the 'idea of the critic's business', as it was outlined by Arnold in the first of his own *Essays in Criticism* (1865). Let it be admitted at once, however, that Arnold's essay is only a stalking-horse. Although I shall be referring to it more than once in the following pages, my real concern here is not with what Arnold thought the critic's business was when he wrote that most admirable essay – it was originally published, in somewhat different form but under the same title, in *The National Review* for November 1864 – but with the English-speaking critic's business today, here and now, in the 1950's. In the course of this inquiry, however, I hope to show that Arnold's essay can be useful to us not only as an academic symbol (it is, I suppose, the best critical essay ever written by an Oxford professor), but also perhaps as a guide and exemplar in our present literary discontents.<sup>9</sup>

Bateson's championing of Arnoldian critical ideology stems, he goes on to say, from his belief that Arnold's literary criticism could offer a template for the 1950s. 'Today we have, I think, exhausted the critical edification [of Dr. Johnson] . . . whose partial demise is attributable, as much as to anyone, to the influence of Arnold.'<sup>10</sup> Bateson's argument was that if Oxford was to play a significant role in the second half of the twentieth century it would be through example of 'three virtues that are especially associated'<sup>11</sup> with Arnold: '*intellectual*

<sup>7</sup> Storer's eventual conclusion on the issue of how much the influence of their universities played a role in shaping their respective literary ideologies, and furthermore, how much the traditional rivalry between the their institutions contributed to the antithesis of the debate was only that such influences 'perhaps played a part'. Storer, p.91.

<sup>8</sup> F.W. Bateson, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time', *Essays in Criticism*, III, 1, 1-27, p.1.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p.2

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

*clarity, spiritual integrity, [and] social conscience.*'<sup>12</sup> So commendable, in Bateson's view, were these virtues that he and his co-editors in tribute gave *Essays in Criticism* 'its Arnoldian title'.<sup>13</sup> It has been said of Leavis, as I have noted in the first chapter, that he consistently 'refused to define a clear theoretical basis for his work'.<sup>14</sup> Though B.K. Grant argues that this was his 'greatest strength',<sup>15</sup> several Leavisian critics are united by the view that through a career long endorsement of Arnold's methods and critical ideology, Leavis (like Bateson) had also 'explicitly located himself in the Arnoldian Tradition'.<sup>16</sup> As such it may be said that it would seem unlikely that Leavis would have objected to Bateson's promotion of Arnoldian values if expressed in *Arnold's terms*. The stress here of course is: Arnold's terms. Indeed Leavis's objection to Bateson's essay (and its mobilization of Arnold as the critical prototype for the argument presented) centred, as Leavis put it, on Bateson's 'misunderstanding',<sup>17</sup> of Arnold's thinking in order support his own 'confused',<sup>18</sup> ideology. That this misapplication of the nineteenth-century poet and critic *could* occur, and occur so 'disastrously',<sup>19</sup> as Leavis felt it had in Bateson's manifesto for *Essays in Criticism*, was something that Leavis can be said to have concluded from his initial debate with Bateson in 1935. Evidence of this is perhaps most apparent in his essay 'Arnold's Thought' (1939) where Leavis states that 'no concession can be allowed that denies Arnold remarkable distinction of intelligence',<sup>20</sup> but if

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* Bateson's italics.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> B.K. Grant, 2006. 'Criticism-Ideology', *Shirmer Encyclopaedia of Film*, (Ontario: Shirmer Reference) p.3. Grant's view had also be expressed a year earlier (and in several subsequent occasions) by G. Singh. See G. Singh, 1995. *F.R. Leavis: A Literary Biography*, (London: Duckworth) p.43-48.

<sup>15</sup> B.K. Grant, 'Criticism-Ideology', p.3.

<sup>16</sup> Storer, p.13. For additional support on the view that Leavis's criticism was heavily influenced by Arnold see Walter James Caulfield, 2010. 'Poetry is the Reality': Matthew Arnold Tackles the Athletes of Logic (and Theory)', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 39, 3, 237-259. Gary Day, 1993. Editorial notes to F. R. Leavis's, 'Literary Criticism and Anti Philosophy', in *The British Critical Tradition: A Re-evaluation*, (London: Macmillan) p. 188-211. And also R.P. Bilan, 1979. *The Literary Criticism of F.R. Leavis*, (Cambridge: CUP). p.18-21, 72-74, 100.

<sup>17</sup> F.R. Leavis, 2008. 'The Responsible Critic or The Function of Criticism at Anytime', *Scrutiny*, XIX, 4, 1952-1953, (Cambridge: CUP) p.162.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> F.R. Leavis, 1939. 'Arnold's Thought', *Scrutiny*, VIII, 1, 92-99. p.96.



his ‘virtues are to be properly recognised it is important not to apply wrong criteria’<sup>21</sup> to their understanding. And it was precisely this type of ‘misunderstanding’ that, for Leavis, had characterised Bateson’s essay.

After detailing the origin of *Essays in Criticism*’s title, Bateson states:

Between the death of Arnold and the emergence of Eliot’s literary criticism in England and America had almost reached its lowest ebb. A short reign of terror was needed to discredit once and for all the Watts-Dunton and the Stopford Brookes, the Gosses and the Clutton-Brocks, the Herbert Warrens and the Sidney Lees, *et hoc genus omne*. Unfortunately those eminent bores and charlatans were not the only casualties. As is usual in revolutions, some of the innocent and inoffensive perished with the guilty, and the critical losses included here and there such solid literary virtues as factual accuracy, awareness of the historical background, linguistic *expertise*, and even sometimes the ability to write lucid English.<sup>22</sup>

Again, while Leavis would have been unlikely to dispute the importance of the critical values that Bateson viewed as lost — such as ‘factual accuracy, awareness of the historical background, [and] linguistic *expertise*’,<sup>23</sup> the contention emerged in that Bateson made clear his belief that such losses were exactly those ‘deficiencies that characterize’<sup>24</sup> the critical writing of Leavis. ‘It is no longer desirable,’ writes Bateson, ‘or indeed possible, to continue to turn a blind eye to certain deficiencies that characterize, in greater or less degree, the critical writings of such men as Leavis is one.’<sup>25</sup> While Bateson eases the insult slightly in acknowledging qualities of stature and personality in Leavis and some of the other critics he attacks,<sup>26</sup> the principal emphasis of his essay attends to their ‘defects’,<sup>27</sup> defects that he felt exerted a ‘corrupting influence on the criticism of the younger generation’.<sup>28</sup> In stating this Bateson goes on, what he terms, a ‘critical *sottisier*’<sup>29</sup> examining I.A. Richards, C.S. Lewis, William Empson, and John Crowe Ransom (in that order), to demonstrate central aspects of

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Bateson, ‘Present Time’, p.2.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.* (Bateson’s italics)

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Others whom Bateson noted were T.S. Eliot, J. Middleton Murry, I.A. Richards, John Crowe Ransom, Kenneth Burke, C.S. Lewis, G. Wilson Knight, William Empson, and Yvor Winters.

<sup>27</sup> Bateson, ‘Present Time’, p.2.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p.3.

their criticism as 'irresponsible'.<sup>30</sup> His collective charge is that each of them mislead their readers, that they evade their social duty, and that while this 'abuse of social-function',<sup>31</sup> and critical irresponsibility may occur accidentally (or 'unconsciously') in the criticism of Leavis, Empson, Lewis, and Ransom, because of their failure to recognise it despite their prominence and influence it was therefore 'reckless',<sup>32</sup> and 'insidious'.<sup>33</sup> Bateson's main grievance is the refusal of these critics to pay necessary attention to the social-context of literature in their critical judgements. To see 'the object in itself',<sup>34</sup> as they do, he adds, originated as 'a plea for objectivity amid the subjectivism of Victorian criticism'.<sup>35</sup> 'No doubt the actual words on the page are read as closely as ever before, but all that lies behind the words and the word-order—the forces, conventions and precedents that have made and modified them—is too often taken for granted.'<sup>36</sup> This loss of 'context' had led directly to an incompetence and lack of essential 'critical',<sup>37</sup> knowledge that *Essays in Criticism* would not, Bateson pronounced, tolerate in its own critical approach.

The most immediate observation that can be made of Bateson's position is that it constituted a re-expression of the argument in his *E.P.E.L.* thesis and in the exchanges with Leavis that ensued in 1935. However, it also comprised a development from his argument back then, in the sense that Bateson now sought to distinguish between 'context' and 'background':

A literary context must be distinguished, of course, from a literary background. The latter is best limited, I think, to the constituents of a literary work before and after their momentary synthesis in it. An author's biography, the social history of his age,

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<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.* By stating essential 'critical' knowledge, Bateson implies (much as he had in 1935 with the Eliot examples) that in order for it to be successful criticism requires a scholarly consideration of context. Hence consideration of socio-history, context and background, although they were the 'tools of the scholar, according to Bateson, were vital to 'critical' knowledge and where they were absent or too limited (as in the case of the critics mentioned in (fn. 25) the criticism was irresponsible.

an account of earlier treatments of his subject-matter—these are all background topics and have only, on this basis, a limited critical relevance. Context, however, is the framework of reference within which the work achieves meaning. To read a poem and ignore its context is, in fact, to misread it. A similar ignorance of its background may make a poem a little more difficult to understand but can do no positive harm. Background, in short, is extrinsic, context is intrinsic.<sup>38</sup>

The importance Bateson attributes to knowledge of ‘context’ (and the critical consequences where an attention to it is absent) thus became the ideological anlace to his essay’s most sustained attack—the attack on Leavis’s reading of Marvell and Pope in *Revaluation* (1936). While I have spoken briefly of *Revaluation* in the previous chapter my comments on it are independent of Bateson’s perspective, but it is worth re-iterating that it was published by Leavis during his exchanges with Bateson, and that its leading argument (made apropos of two four-line extracts from Marvell’s ‘A Dialogue between the Soul and Body’ and Pope’s ‘Dunciad iv’) was that Pope’s wit ‘represented a continuation of the Metaphysical tradition’<sup>39</sup> of Marvell. For Bateson, the ‘affinities’<sup>40</sup> Leavis saw between the two poems depended entirely from an observation of verbal similarity in the last line of each excerpt. And these can be seen here, as I have italicised:

A Soul hung up, as ‘twere, in Chains  
Of Nerves, and Arteries, and Veins.  
Tortur’d, besides each other apart,  
*In a vain Head, and double Heart.*  
From Marvell, ‘A Dialogue between the Soul and Body’.

First slave to Words, then Vassal to a Name,  
Then Dupe to Party, child and man the same;  
Bounded by Nature, narrow’d still by Art,  
*A trifling head, and a contracted heart.*  
From Pope, ‘Dunciad’ (iv: 501-4).

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<sup>38</sup> Bateson, ‘Present Time’, p.3.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p.15.

Bateson recognises that the verbal similarity is 'of course, striking and obvious',<sup>41</sup> however, his concern is that 'Leavis makes the collocation in order to establish a resemblance between Marvell's and Pope's poetic styles',<sup>42</sup> in a wider (and unjustified) general sense, whereas Bateson believed that beyond the 'verbal similarity',<sup>43</sup> the 'affinities disappear'.<sup>44</sup> Stating his case for why the stylistic similarity in both passages should not to be taken as evidence of something beyond the verbal, Bateson writes:

In terms of literary tradition the meanings of 'head' and 'heart' are demonstrably quite different in the two passages. In Marvell's lines the vivid images of the first couplet almost compel the reader to visualize the torture chambers of the 'vain Head, and double Heart'. It is the kind of allegory that was popularised in the early seventeenth century by Emblem Books, in which a more or less conventional concept is dressed up in some striking new clothes, the new clothes being the real *raison d'être*. In Pope's last line, however, the abstract or quasi-abstract words which lead up to it make almost impossible to *see* either the 'trifling head' or the 'the contracted heart'. Obviously Pope's 'head' and 'heart' belong to the same order of reality as his 'Nature' and 'Art'.<sup>45</sup>

In his account of the essential differences between Marvell's lines and the lines of Pope's poem, Bateson traces the influence of tradition that becomes apparent through a wider contextual consideration of the respective periods of the poets, the 'climate of opinion',<sup>46</sup> and 'thought-patterns current in their time'.<sup>47</sup> In discussing the literary-historical context of Marvell's and Pope's poetry (as would continue to do throughout his essay), Bateson asserts that 'the most interesting feature in the lines is that the Metaphysical style in which he was writing had *forced* Marvell to say what he cannot have wanted to say',<sup>48</sup> and that 'Pope's Augustan style had forced his hand in the same way'.<sup>49</sup> The historicist method Bateson uses whereby via establishing a literary-context he feels able to identify what Marvell and Pope

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<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, p.19.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, p.20

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p.15

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, p.16.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*

would have *preferred* to say as distinct from what they were *forced* to say, remains a problematic issue in modern theoretical criticism. While I shall attend to this in chapter 5, it is worth noting that in the United States, Wimsatt and Beardsley's influential essay 'The Intentional Fallacy' (1946) and Cleanth Brooks's *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947) (which Bateson would vehemently attack) had paved the way for a widespread discussion on authorial intention (its legitimacy and importance) on both sides of the Atlantic. A few significant examples of what would become an extended branch of literary theory saw critics and theorists such as Roland Barthes, Jerrold Levinson, Gary Iseminger, and David Newton de Molina examine the issue of intention in relation to critical evaluation and judgement. Leavis's response to Bateson's assumptions regarding authorial intention can be seen parallel to further positions taken up before and after his debate with Bateson. One such aspect of Leavis's challenging of Bateson on this matter is the fundamental question of whether the author's intention holds (or should hold) significance in the understanding, evaluation, and judgment of the merit of a work. Bateson appears, however, to side-step the anti-intentionalist argument that 'extrinsic' contextual information such as authorial intention is illegitimate territory for the *literary* critic, in that, as stated above, he regards these considerations not merely as important extrinsic knowledge, but as essential to the understanding of the 'intrinsic' poetry itself. Indeed, it was this, Bateson claimed, that enabled the critic to understand 'the contradictions between what Marvell and Pope would like to have written and what they actually wrote'.<sup>50</sup> Bateson's belief was that literary critics are not 'immoralists',<sup>51</sup> simply trying to make arrangements from 'black marks on the page',<sup>52</sup> nor neurotically interested in mere metrical and verbal stylistics. For Bateson literary *values* are the embodiment of 'human experience',<sup>53</sup> in literature. Thus the original social context at the

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<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, p.16.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, p.19.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, p.18.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*

time of the work's composition was necessary if such human experience was to be 'realized and re-enacted',<sup>54</sup> by the reader and a true evaluation of a work's merit was to be critically achieved. Though it is often difficult, even tedious, Bateson expressed, to achieve this 'degree of self-absorption',<sup>55</sup> in the social and historical context of a writer and work, difficulty in itself was not an excuse for not doing it. To 'be called the responsible reader',<sup>56</sup> 'it is important' states Bateson, 'to emphasize the *utile* as well as the *dulce* of criticism.'<sup>57</sup> Bateson's conclusion, however, (much like his 1935 reply to Leavis) was not 'as might perhaps have been anticipated, a simple recommendation to extend the function of criticism to the exploration of literature's social roots'.<sup>58</sup> His conclusion was in fact an assertion that neither a purely sociological approach of contextual consideration nor a restricted analysis of the poem itself (such as that in the criticism of I.A. Richards) were dependable or useful as isolated approaches. It would be, for Bateson, a combination of *both* that offered a way forward. While Leavis's type of criticism was 'stimulating, ingenious, provocative and original',<sup>59</sup> comprising, as it did, detailed studies of single poems as intrinsic objects, Bateson's concern was that:

In total effect, instead of taking us closer to the human situations and the statements on the human condition that the poems contain – in other words, to whatever gives them their value to other human beings – is to bemuse the reader with the structural patterns . . . juggling with terms like 'ambiguity', 'paradox' and 'irony' replaces any serious attempt to analyse the profounder meanings of the poems . . . this, indeed, is the trouble with many of the technical terms coined or popularized by 'New Critics'. So far from bringing the reader nearer the concrete actualities of what this or that stanza, scene or chapter really means in human terms, words like 'tension' and 'texture' (there are many others) tend to divert him from them by concentrating his attention of abstract relationships that may have a certain logical interest but that, in most cases, have little or no immediate human relevance.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, p.19.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, p.21.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, p.23.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, p.24.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, p.23. What we see here, is a concern that much attention has been paid to in autotelic criticism both, before, during, and after the Leavis-Bateson clashes. As noted, the American debates on the role of extrinsic and intrinsic evidence would later define an era of contention between intentionalist and anti-intentionalists. One of these major causes of disagreement, dividing both these critics and theorists alike can be seen here between

On the other hand, continued Bateson, a ‘*purely contextual*’<sup>61</sup> reading where there was insufficient focus on the literature as it stood on the page, also suffered its own evaluative limitations. Bateson argues this point by stating:

The sociological school fails because of even more disastrous error in the opposite direction. It is in such a hurry to get to the implicit ideas and social attitudes that it *skims* literature instead of reading it. The conclusion about it all will now be obvious. It is simply that if we are to see the object as it really is we must use both methods—a balance, in other words, of literary and sociological criticism, in which one mode of may serve as the complement of the corrective of the other.<sup>62</sup>

Ultimately then for Bateson, the method necessary to correct the losses and failures of the period would be achieved through a positive balance of sociological ‘contextual’ criticism, and the type of practical criticism in which analysis pays due attention on the work’s internal stylistics. The interesting and memorable way in which Bateson phrased this amalgam of methods was summed up in his plea: ‘Let us go to school with both Mr. Empson and Mr. Trilling.’<sup>63</sup> The reason why Bateson deemed it necessary to incorporate the evaluative practice of Empson and Trilling together (into one) was that the effect of the merger would produce a method whereby the deficiencies of both Empson’s and Trilling’s critical approaches (in their singular application) would be corrected by the particular qualities of the other. That such a ‘balance’ was necessary (and the reason why Bateson was not prepared to

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Leavis and Bateson. Extrinsic evidence is any information or knowledge from outside of a literary text itself; for example, information relating the author’s life, influences, social, political or historical circumstances. Bateson supports the use of extrinsic evidence in the belief that contextual knowledge from outside of the text itself influences reading and evaluation of a literary work and thus places the critic in the best possible position from which to understand the work as it relates to the life, intentions and nature of the author. Through identifying the circumstance of the author, a critic may then feel able to evaluate how successfully a work expresses the intention or designing ambition of its artist. In contrast, Leavis, in what is his central difference to Bateson (as it had been in the 1935 exchanges) argues against the use of extrinsic evidence, viewing the effect of such extrinsic influences not only as irrelevant to the judgment of the merits and qualities of the text, but even, to use Wimsatt and Beardsley’s admonition: ‘unavailable’, and even ‘[un]desirable’ in terms of bringing us closer to the author. For Leavis the relevant and significant context should be realised through engagement with the text itself. Though Leavis was not quite as decisive in removing context from analysis as Wimsatt and Beardsley, his theory and position (in the sense that it is similar) preceded Wimsatt and Beardsley by eleven years in expressing what M.H. Abrams would later reconfigure as a belief that a work of literature should be evaluated as a self-sufficient and autonomous object: ‘as a world-in-itself, which is to be judged solely by “intrinsic” criteria such as its complexity, coherence, equilibrium, integrity, and the interrelation of its component elements.’ M.H. Abrams, (ed.) 1999. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, (Boston: Heinle) p.70.

<sup>61</sup> Bateson, ‘Present Time’, p.25.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*

go with either Empson or Trilling alone) was that Empson, he argued, too often displayed a type of criticism in which verbal fragments (for example, words and particular literary mechanisms) were lifted out of a wider context, and applied solely as if the page they were printed on was the total world they existed in. Trilling's critical approach, on the other hand, was insufficient in that it displayed a *lack* of interest in the verbal and stylistic elements of the literary piece, and in consequence, had a tendency to promote what Wayne Booth called an 'over-standing'<sup>64</sup> of wider contextual information. 'Of this critical balance, this equilibrium between literary meaning in the ordinary sense and the social sense in which the meaning alone acquires value, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" remains to me',<sup>65</sup> concluded Bateson, 'the supreme model.'<sup>66</sup>

Leavis, in his response 'The Responsible Critic or: The Function of Criticism at Any Time' (1953)<sup>67</sup> states from the offset that *Essays in Criticism*, although it had intended to surpass *Scrutiny* as a journal, had, in his view, not achieved that. 'We have not', Leavis says (referring to the editorial board of *Scrutiny*) found the pages of *Essays in Criticism* 'characterized by such notable examples of scholarly or critical or scholarly-critical practice as might call forth the blush of shame' upon our own.<sup>68</sup> Leavis states that he saw 'no reason for not pronouncing bluntly'<sup>69</sup> on the 'long statement of position and elaboration'<sup>70</sup> of *Essays*

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<sup>64</sup> Peter Rawlings, in *American Theorists of the Novel* (2006) explains that Wayne C. Booth 'defines "understanding" as the "process" of "entering another mind". Novels offer readers through their implied authors various values, moral attitudes, and so on; arguing with these, even repudiating them, and coming up with different perspectives on the world of the novel is what Booth means by "overstanding". 'Understanding', then, is the reader's reconstruction of what the text demands; when the reader recognizes the point at which the 'violation of its demands will prove necessary'; he begins to "overstand". Peter Rawlings, 2006. *American Theorists of the Novel: Henry James, Lionel Trilling, Wayne C. Booth*. (London: Routledge) p.101-102. See also Wayne C. Booth, 1979. *Critical Understanding: The Powers and Limits of Pluralism*, (Chicago: Chicago UP) p.242, 262.

<sup>65</sup> Bateson, 'Present Time', p.25

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Leavis, 'Anytime', p.162. Leavis's essay although about Bateson and *Essays in Criticism* was published in *Scrutiny*, XIV, 4, 317-331. (in the 'Correspondence' section.)

<sup>68</sup> Leavis, 'Anytime', p.162.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*



in *Criticism's* programme, by which he meant Bateson's essay 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time'.

The first aspect of Bateson's error-strewn and 'confused'<sup>71</sup> essay that Leavis challenges is Bateson's belief, as Leavis understood it, that 'we [critics] may be too precipitate in supposing ourselves in a position to judge a poem, and that sometimes more scholarly knowledge may be necessary.'<sup>72</sup> Leavis mockingly acknowledges this to be true in so far as it is demonstrated to be true in the case of Bateson's own critical deficiencies.<sup>73</sup>

Leavis's position against Bateson, expressed here for the first time in eighteen years, was that he did not like the distinction made between scholarship and criticism, *especially* not the notion that scholarship is a distinctive act aimed at the cultivation of accuracy and precision. This point, Leavis argues, he had made all those years ago when he contested that 'accuracy is a matter of relevance, and that in the literary field exactness and precision cannot easily exist unless one is intelligent about literature'.<sup>74</sup> While Leavis does not elaborate or specify precisely what he means by 'intelligent about literature',<sup>75</sup> he does make a firm commitment to 'practical criticism'.<sup>76</sup> For Leavis this entailed that a text should be self-sufficient in expressing its total meaning, thus a critic, 'the kind trained in practical criticism, will therefore, if they are intelligent about literature, be themselves, 'aware of period peculiarities of idiom, linguistic usage, convention, and so on. . .'<sup>77</sup> He adds:

The most important kind of knowledge will be acquired in the cultivation of the poetry of the period, and of other periods, with the literary critic's intelligence. Miss Tuve's insistence on an immense apparatus of scholarship before one can read

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<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Leavis, 'Anytime', p.162.

<sup>73</sup> Leavis does not refer to Bateson as a literary historian as he still clearly felt such a distinction to be unnecessary given that Bateson's 'type of history' (as he argued in 1935) was essentially literary criticism.

<sup>74</sup> Leavis, 'Anytime', p.163

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.* Phrases such as 'intelligent about literature' which, in this particular instance, centralises a dependence on the sub-connotative term 'intelligent' (and what Leavis means by 'intelligent') I examine in greater detail in chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>76</sup> Leavis, 'Anytime', p.163. An interesting account of Leavis's relation to the methods of practical criticism is presented in Terry Eagleton's chapter 'The Rise of English' in Terry Eagleton, 1983. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, (Oxford: Blackwell) p.43-44.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*

intelligently or judge is characteristic of the academic over-emphasis on scholarly knowledge; it accompanies a clear lack of acquaintance with intelligent critical reading. And of so extravagant an elaboration of 'contextual' procedures as Mr. Bateson commits himself to one would even without the conclusive exemplifying he does for us, have ventured, with some confidence, that the 'contextual' critic would not only intrude a vast deal of critical irrelevance on his poem; he would show a marked lack of concern for the most essential kinds of knowledge.<sup>78</sup>

Leavis's inverts Bateson's accusation of 'irresponsibility' by arguing that Bateson himself is engaged in a type of critical irresponsibility 'through a lack of concern' with 'essential knowledge' and through imposing 'a vast deal of critical irrelevance' into his critical analysis. Leavis then turns his attention to what has been termed the 'main battleground'<sup>79</sup> of his exchanges with Bateson; Bateson's assault on the shortcomings of his reading of Marvell and Pope. Leavis points out that Bateson's efforts to undermine him are based on the incorrect assumption that in affirming a poetic connection between Marvell and Pope he had looked only as far as the verbal affinities between individual passages. Refuting this in strong terms, Leavis argued that he made it perfectly clear in *Revaluation* that the affinity he spoke of was one of 'a certain crisp precision of statement, a poised urbanity of movement and tone'.<sup>80</sup> In stating his case against Bateson's charges, Leavis contests that the passages show not merely verbal similarity but an emotive equivalence in which Pope's mixture of wit with the polite had clear antecedents in the poetry of Marvell. Leavis writes:

It is, then, plain enough that Pope's reconciliation of Metaphysical wit with the Polite has antecedents.' I am indicating the way back from Pope to Ben Jonson, and if Mr. Bateson had thought the whole presented case worth attending to he might have been led to observe in Marvell some marked antecedents of the Augustan to which 'the implications and ramifications of context' leave him blind.<sup>81</sup>

Leavis's method of observing 'antecedents' and charting 'the way back' from certain poetry to other poetry would appear, as he suggests it, to be exactly the aim of Bateson's proposed scholarship. In this sense, we may deduce that Leavis supposes his criticism, in effect, to

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<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Storer, p.2.

<sup>80</sup> Leavis, 'Anytime', p.164.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*

already achieve or subsumes the aims of Bateson's scholarly method, because it is intelligent about the literature—and *within* that 'intelligence' there is the 'necessary'<sup>82</sup> social and historical knowledge. Leavis at this juncture patronises Bateson by sympathising with his deemed theoretical failure, stating that it is hard when in trying to be so precise, you are so wrong. Leavis continues his *faux* sympathy with the hollow caveat that, the disservice Bateson does to Pope and Marvell, is greatly worse than what he is about to inflict on Bateson.

Leavis centres on Bateson's detailed critique of Marvell's 'A Dialogue between Body and Soul' in which he outlines its differences to Pope's *Dunciad* IV 501-4. Bateson, Leavis notes, acknowledges that the use of 'head' and 'heart' in both poems obviously present verbal similarities, but the differences in both poems are identifiable in the figures of speech and stylistic convention employed by the poets. Bateson's basis for distinguishing the poems, observed Leavis, was that he deemed Marvell's poem as a work of 'imagery',<sup>83</sup> of 'grey abstractions',<sup>84</sup> and 'psychological terminology'.<sup>85</sup> This postulation however, according to Leavis, shows nothing of any critical significance, arguing that Bateson has not sufficiently demonstrated evidence of differing speech and stylistic conventions, rather he has 'merely asserted'<sup>86</sup> a difference to exist—that difference being summed up by the claim that Marvell uses 'picture language'.<sup>87</sup> Leavis's belief is that a reader acquainted with Marvell would know Bateson's claim to be 'false'.<sup>88</sup> Printing the full first speech from Marvell's 'A Dialogue between Soul and Body', Leavis stresses that whilst there certainly exists some potent vivid imagery; where can it be said to be visual in the sense that Mr. Bateson calls it

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<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, p.165.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*, p.164.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, p.166.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*

'picture language'?<sup>89</sup> For Leavis, the imagery that Bateson considers picture language is neither factual nor presentable via description, and as such, the poetic content is irresponsibly misunderstood and insufficiently framed by Bateson's clunky phraseology of which the term 'picture language' exemplifies. Indeed for Leavis, no image could bear any relation to Marvell's poem, which, as he continues to explain, is a very different thing to what Bateson says it is. Essentially, Leavis argues, the poem transcends visualization and thus, on this basis, is surprised to hear a scholar 'who should know better'<sup>90</sup> provide such a limited assessment as to refer to it as kind of allegory in the vein of the Emblem books popularized in the seventeenth century.<sup>91</sup>

Indeed, Leavis states, to call it an allegory at all is to mislead, and furthermore, to say it 'dresses up a conventional idea in new clothes' is to convey the opposite of the truth about it. For it is a profoundly critical and inquiring poem devoted to some subtle exploratory

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<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Leavis, 'Anytime', p.172

<sup>91</sup> In Storer's study of the debate he states that: 'Bateson's argument is that the poem must be understood in relation to the genre of the 'Emblem book', popular in the early seventeenth century and particularly associated with the poet Francis Quarles (1592-1644), in which a poem appeared alongside a picture, both illustrating a familiar concept. He cites an actual example from Quarles's *Emblemes* of 'the convention in which Marvell was writing – a skeleton lolling in a sitting posture (the Body) with a kneeling figure inside it (the Soul)'. In Marvell's case, Bateson argues, the use of the convention results in a poem which is *too* visual; we are encouraged to visualise the soul being tortured in the different parts of the body, including the head and heart – but Marvell cannot have meant to suggest that the head and heart were just parts of the body like any other, and so he has ended up saying something he did not mean. Marvell has in effect let the Emblem 'convention' take over his poem; once we know the convention, we realise all that needs to be said about the poem. Storer, p. 92. A colleague of Storer's, fellow Leavisian Chris Joyce, provides reflection on this aspect of the 1953 dispute by saying that 'Leavis could be a formidable controversialist, as F.W. Bateson discovered in the pages of *Scrutiny* for Spring and October 1953. Bateson had challenged Leavis's reading (in *Revaluation*) of Marvell's poem 'A Dialogue between the Soul and Body' (and an associated comparison with Pope) alleging deficiencies in Leavis's scholarly knowledge. He concentrated in particular on what he called Marvell's 'picture language' enlisting the Quarles emblems in support. The truth, Leavis pointed out, was the opposite. Marvell presents us with paradoxes in which a visual element is present but far from dominant: 'How do we see the Soul? What visual images correspond to 'fetter'd' and manacled'? We certainly don't see manacles on the Soul's hands and feet: the Soul's hands and feet are the Body's, and it is the fact that they are the Body's that makes them 'manacles' ...' Leavis does not deny that a certain amount of specialist knowledge may assist the reading of a poem but it is always the intelligent reading of the poem *itself* that takes priority. The historical context in which Bateson proposes to anchor the reading is something much less determinate. Leavis takes the opportunity to make a point which is especially valid today in relation to theories of 'cultural materialism' and 'new historicism': To suggest that their *purpose* should be to reconstruct a postulated 'social context' that once enclosed the poem and gave it its meaning is to set the student after something that no study of history, social, economic, political, intellectual, religious, can yield. The poem ... is *there*; but there is nothing ... that can be set over against the poem, or induced to re-establish itself round it as a kind of framework or completion, and there never was anything.' Chris Joyce. 2008. *Centre for Leavis Studies* [Online] <http://mypages.surrey.ac.uk/eds1cj/f-r-leavis-life-and-work.htm>. [Accessed 04 December 11].

thinking’<sup>92</sup> that questions and challenges conventional concepts and ‘current habits of mind’.<sup>93</sup> Leavis’s argument here is that while readers will undoubtedly observe a visual element to essentially non-visual words such as ‘soul’ ‘fettered’ or ‘manacled’, to become too majorly fixed on seeing manacles and fetters is the reading of someone not adjusted to the poem’s further significance. Whilst it is not expressed directly by Leavis, the further significance he speaks of may be the existential nature of the poem’s inquiry and the efficiency of the language in encapsulating the body’s physical appropriation of Marvell’s metaphysical torment. Leavis writes:

Reading this rightly, we feel, as something more than stated, the Soul’s protest (paradoxically in part physical—this is where ‘imagery’ comes in) against the so intimately and inescapably associated matter: the introduction ‘with bolts of bones’ makes the antithesis, Soul and Body, seem clear and sharp.<sup>94</sup>

Several of the key complaints Leavis holds against Bateson are noted in a short section of R.P. Bilan’s *The Literary Criticism of F.R. Leavis* (1979). Bilan believes that part ‘of the hostility Leavis generates comes from his intransigent opposition to scholarship, ‘work on, about and around the great works of literature, which is not directed by a serious and relevant critical interest’.<sup>95</sup> It is not difficult to identify the basis of Bilan’s understanding. Leavis makes clear his belief that the poem ‘is a determinate thing; it is *there*; but there is nothing to correspond—nothing answering to Mr. Bateson’s “social context” that can be set over against the poem . . . and there never was anything’.<sup>96</sup> As such, for Leavis, Bateson’s proposal that in order to achieve a correct reading of a poem one must put it back into the ‘total context’<sup>97</sup> was a methodological illusion, due to fact that ‘context’, as something determinate, was itself, an illusion. Bateson’s approach, according to Bilan’s critical assessment, would thus make ‘literary criticism completely dependent on extra-literary studies in a way that is anathema to

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<sup>92</sup> Leavis, ‘Anytime’, p.166.

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> R.P. Bilan, 1979. *The Literary Criticism of F.R. Leavis*, (Cambridge: CUP) p.81.

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Leavis, ‘Anytime’, p.172

Leavis',<sup>98</sup> who as I noted earlier began his response with the very clear indictment that the 'inordinate apparatus of "contextual" aids'<sup>99</sup> that Bateson sought to deploy, were in fact unnecessary to the intelligent critic, the critic that by virtue of 'intelligence'<sup>100</sup> and 'responsibility'<sup>101</sup> will have an acquired an 'understanding of the civilisation that the poem is written out of'.<sup>102</sup> It is important to note however, a point Bilan makes, that Leavis isn't merely suggesting that his method is more preferable than Bateson's in adducing a total social context; rather it is the firm judgment that no such social context is possible, and in consequence, Bateson, in proposing that it is, 'is setting the student, and critic, after something no study could yield.'<sup>103</sup>

In assessing the poem over and beyond Bateson's 'limited'<sup>104</sup> evaluation of it as 'simple scheme' of 'emblematic', 'allegorical', and 'diagrammatic'<sup>105</sup> devices, Leavis expresses an uncertainty as to whether Bateson can be said to have read the poem at all. Leavis draws attention to his surprise that Bateson, in an essay where he had sought to correct other critics, had performed so poorly himself. Moreover he was surprised that no-one on *Essays in Criticism's* editorial board made note of Bateson's errors prior to the essay reaching print, as it did, as the first feature in the first issue of the third volume. Leavis's remark that Bateson had not *read* the poem, however, interestingly comprises a double-connotation in that it highlights what Leavis means by 'reading' the poem; the implication being that

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<sup>98</sup> Bilan, *The Literary Criticism*, p.81.

<sup>99</sup> Leavis, 'Anytime', p.174.

<sup>100</sup> Leavis, 'Anytime', p.166.

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Bilan, *The Literary Criticism*, p.81.

<sup>103</sup> *ibid.* Bilan adds that for Leavis, 'the essential knowledge the critic needs can come only from the reading of poetry and not from background knowledge'. It is perhaps arguable that Bilan has, in reaching this view, failed to acknowledge Bateson's separation of 'context' from 'background' as such. The tendency of course, to conflate them, seems, on surface, innocent - but it is nevertheless a simplification that enters the logical trap Bateson had originally set for Leavis. Bilan, however, is invariably sharp off the mark, particularly in noting the significance of Leavis's belief (Bilan's ellipses) that 'some of the essential meanings that one has to recognise are created by the poet, but this possibility . . . Mr. Bateson cannot permit himself to entertain'. Leavis, suggests Bilan, believes that 'neither scholarship nor literary history is fully adequate to grasp the nature of the poet's enquiry; only the discipline of literary criticism can properly come to terms with the poet's work.' Bilan, *The Literary Criticism*, p.81-83.

<sup>104</sup> Leavis, 'Anytime', p.165.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.* p.167.

Bateson's reading had focused on external contexts to the point of allowing only an inadequate reading of the internal literary device of the poem itself.<sup>106</sup> Of course, Bateson's counter view would be that contextual knowledge, aids meaning. Leavis, argues Storer, ridicules Bateson's 'scholarly method of control',<sup>107</sup> which has the effect of making this 'much more fruitful'<sup>108</sup> reading of the poem 'illicit'.<sup>109</sup> An important emphasis in Storer's understanding of Leavis's method is stated as follows:

Leavis's close reading of the poem has had the opposite of a limiting or controlling effect. He has discovered 'illicit' meaning denied by Bateson's more controlling approach; his meaning, moreover, affirms the poet's creativity over his dependence on convention. He has in effect (to recall his terms in 'Literary Studies') made more of a profit from the poem than Bateson – and in the pragmatic, production orientated terms (as in the Wellek exchange) Leavis is more appealing.<sup>110</sup>

The issue here is again one of intentionality. Bateson's concern with Leavis's reading method is that 'produces',<sup>111</sup> meaning—often a 'more fruitful meaning'<sup>112</sup> than that intended by the author, and thus he judges the work according to this new reader-created meaning. By contrast, Leavis's charge is that Bateson as a scholar believes by evaluating *context* that he can arrive at such claims as to what the author did or did not intend. A good example of Leavis making this concern clear can be seen when he writes:

Bateson's ability to believe, and judicially to pronounce, that Marvell has been guilty of a 'breach of the poem's logic' such as 'cannot possibly have been intended' goes, we have seen, with his decision that Marvell shall have intended what, on the unequivocal and final evidence of the poem itself, it clearly didn't.<sup>113</sup>

Leavis's belief is that speculation over what Marvell intended is dubious particularly where it cannot be evidenced in the poem itself. As this point has been made raised earlier, let us

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<sup>106</sup> As I have suggested, Leavis's approach is that whereby evaluate analysis is deemed best that centres on the poem itself and not allowing knowledge of context to dictate a meaning or value that, when 'intelligently' and duly pondered' would 'yield' itself from the literary object.

<sup>107</sup> Storer, p.92.

<sup>108</sup> Leavis, 'Anytime', p.169.

<sup>109</sup> Storer, p 93.

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> Leavis, 'Anytime', p.170.

<sup>112</sup> Storer, p 93. R.Storer quotes F.W. Bateson, 1953. 'The Responsible Critic: A Reply', *Scrutiny*, XIX, 4. (Cambridge: CUP) p.317.

<sup>113</sup> Leavis, 'Anytime', p.170.

further an understanding of what is meant by it. Certainly, it holds notable parallels to the principle tenet of a critical position termed ‘The New Criticism’ by John Crowe Ransom in his 1941 publication of the same name. Stephen Matterson in his article ‘The New Criticism’ (2006) points out that the use of extrinsic evidence was dismissed as an appropriate way to study a literary work by the New Critics on two fundamental grounds:

The first is that authorial intention is never clear and may always be a matter of dispute. The second ground, and a more important one for the New Critics, was that to invoke intention was to threaten the integrity of the text by introducing the figure of the author. Once the text’s boundaries were threatened, then the system could not be seen as a system of language operating with its own rules.<sup>114</sup>

As Leavis offers detailed study and commentary of Marvell’s poem, he continually observes aspects of significance glanced over by Bateson, all the while debasing Bateson’s critical performance. A strong part of this, and again what links Leavis to certain New Critical and Formalist ideologies, is that his emphasis appears central to the belief that the history and contexts of language can be observed with close attention *to the text* as opposed to the socio-political domains of history and language from realms beyond the immediately artistic world of the text.<sup>115</sup> The degree and severity at which Leavis expresses dismay in Bateson’s critical (or scholarly) position becomes, in-itself, a notable feature of the debate, certainly, at least, of the debate’s character. Angered, for example, at how Bateson veers toward endless and indeterminate social contexts as a mode of analysis, Leavis polarises his opposition by referring to such an approach as ‘flimsy’ and rooted in ‘gratuitousness’ and ‘arbitrariness’.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Stephen Matterson, 2006. ‘The New Criticism’, *Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. P. Waugh, (Oxford: OUP) p.171.

<sup>115</sup> That Leavis’s arguments against Bateson’s ‘social-context’ and Bateson’s un-evidence-able (as Leavis sees it) post-supposition of Marvell’s poetic intention, can be identified in various works of New Critical ideology is also a view shared by Terry Eagleton in his chapter ‘The Rise of English’ in Terry Eagleton, 1983. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, (Oxford: Blackwell)

<sup>116</sup> Leavis, ‘Anytime’, p.172. Looking at the poem as an object or objective entity is a source of major discussion in twentieth century autotelic literary criticism. Andrew Bennett, in his article ‘Expressivity: The Romantic Theory of Authorship’ (2006) argues that in the expressivist aesthetic of Romantic criticism, there was elevated regard for the successful conviction of authorial expression. He states that: ‘The author, as he or she is increasingly conceived in the late in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, has ideas, feelings, intentions, and desires which emerge in the act of composition and result in a pre-linguistic artefact – a poem, play, novel, essay, or other literary work. The act of composition is seen as a way of representing in language an



Leavis's deconstruction of Bateson continues with his statement that Bateson's posited relation between 'poem' and 'social context' is a matter of 'vain and muddled verbiage'.<sup>117</sup>

'The business of the literary critic', writes Leavis, 'is with literary criticism',<sup>118</sup> and as such

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original, pre-linguistic work, an idea of a work that is constituted in – and as – the author's consciousness.' With this, we can identify a departure from the authorial and intention-based focus of Romanticism, to the reader-based focus of modern literary movements. These modern schools, it may be said, have drifted so far to one extreme of the interpretive spectrum that not only has the author faded from the text, but regard for the intentions of the author have become, as Wimsatt and Beardsley say, '[un]desirable' and 'unreliable'. For, Leavis, it is not that he wishes to insulate poetry as a pure or insular realm of literary study, rather that he feels that its value pertains to the inherent subjectivity of the reader, and thus contextual background is not sufficient in-itself as an analytical method to transcend a contemporary reader (as all readers essentially are) into the domain of the work's original audience. Most principally, it may be said, that this was held as belief by Leavis because he felt that such a context and extension of text beyond its artistic boundary would be limitless. But also because Leavis does not believe a preoccupation with context would involve, as he felt it necessarily must, a continual reference back to the poem. This is evidenced in his claim that Bateson does not pay any attention to the poem, and someone looking for the correct meaning would not look at 'the phantom concept of context.' The issue that arises from the fallacious concept of context as Leavis sees it, is whether or not Leavis, by making something better of the poem than Bateson, is guilty too of appropriating virtue upon the work via his critical method. However, as Storer points out, providing a more appealing mode of criticism, or, for that matter, a criticism that produces a more appealing interpretation of the poem, is 'not the level, of course, at which Leavis justifies his reading – the issue is not, who can do more with the poem, but what is the poem in itself?' With this, Leavis continues to grapple, in a defamatory way, with Bateson's essay, arguing that 'nothing is plainer than the arbitrary odds and ends of fact, assumption, and more or less historical summary that [Bateson] produces as context'. These 'serve him' Leavis adds, in no way to a 'serious' reading of the poem. Leavis reproduces Bateson's extract in which he (Bateson) states that 'the discipline of contextual reading...should result in the reconstruction of a human situation that is demonstrably implicit in the particular literary work under discussion.' Leavis here expresses that he does not know what Bateson means entirely, but supposes that he means that 'one may reconstruct the 'essential drama' of a poem correctly without responding to it correctly; that the taking possession of it is independent of valuing.' Feeling that he had corrected Bateson on this matter eighteen years ago, he reminds him again that 'one judges a poem by Marvell not by persuading a hypothetical seventeenth-century 'context'', or any 'social context', to take the responsibility, but, as one alone can, out of one's personal living' (which inevitably is in the twentieth century). Leavis says the value is in the works inseparability from the response, not merely the social context, as this in-itself would assume that the context be considered part of the work. Value, Leavis adds, and the process of valuing a work of literature, is more complex than simply 'putting a price on' it. Andrew Bennett, 2006. 'Expressivity: The Romantic theory of Authorship, *Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. P.Waugh, (Oxford: OUP) p.51-52. Leavis, 'Anytime', p.176-178, 180.

<sup>117</sup> Leavis, 'Anytime', p.178.

<sup>118</sup> *ibid.* Leavis's dislike for Bateson's use of the word 'social' stems from his belief that it is neither accurate nor detailed enough in relation to the subsequent critical concepts in which Bateson claims the influence of the social can be seen. As such, when Bateson's uses phrases and words such as 'trained-reader', 'contribution', 'context' and 'muddled mass society', Leavis seeks elaboration (which he cannot find in Bateson's argument): 'What are these contributions of a trained reader to the muddled mass society...?' he asks, and furthermore, on an equally fundamental level: what is 'purely literary criticism' and 'social context'? Indeed for Leavis, the term 'social context' in itself cannot be synonymous with context in the widest sense, as the word 'social' precedes 'context' and thereby limits context to the merely social. Leavis suggests that Bateson's argument is confusing and ambiguous, and it is confusing and ambiguous for its very purpose, that is to say, that it looks impressive but that in order to remain impressive requires no-one to ask or question its meaning. Stylistically, Leavis's own composition incorporates a continual reprinting of Bateson's paragraphs (as noted earlier in verbatim reproduction). With this approach Leavis can be seen to enable himself to descend upon Bateson's words with a spree of semantic arrests, enquiring and challenging what he expresses as Bateson's 'over simplifications and assumptions'. In addition to this associations can be evidenced between Leavis and several ideologies and theorists from outside of the debate. In this instance, for example, Leavis can be seen to suggest that Bateson's dismissal of Cleanth Brooks's views, in itself, sums up the extravagant irresponsibility that characterizes Bateson's entire essay.

while it is pleasant to think that when a critic speaks of social or political matters his understanding (of the literature itself) will be engaged, his special responsibility must be to serve the literary critical aspect of his inquiry, to the best of his powers. In this sense, Leavis makes it clear that he does not agree with Bateson's statement that the function of criticism matters 'because a skilled reader of literature will tend, by the nature of his skill, to understand and appreciate contemporary social processes better than his neighbours'.<sup>119</sup> Indeed Leavis believes this to be misleading in that even if a critic possessed a clear conception of social matters, unless he understands how such a context matters in relation to the literary work in question, it would be of little *literary* critical value.

Leavis explains his position further by highlighting Bateson's distinction between the 'utile' and 'dulce' of criticism; that is, between what is useful and what is considered pleasant or rewarding. The argument he makes is that such a distinction is flawed. For Leavis, '[t]he *utile* of criticism is to see that the created work fulfils its *raison d'être*; that is, that it is read, understood and duly valued, and has the influence it should have in the contemporary sensibility.<sup>120</sup> By this Leavis means that the critic who relates his business to a full conception of criticism conceives of himself as helping, in a collaborative process, to define, and thus form, the contemporary sensibility. As such, Leavis's argument is that what Bateson *should* have said, is that the objective of 'the skilled reader of literature, is that he will tend, by the nature of his skill',<sup>121</sup> to understand and appreciate contemporary *literature* better than his neighbours. We note of course that this is a reconstruction of Bateson's postulation in the earlier passage where Bateson instead of using the word 'literature' uses the words 'contemporary social processes'.<sup>122</sup> Leavis's revision of Bateson's words again point to the necessity of *literary focus* as the determining factor of a criticism that seeks to deem itself

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<sup>119</sup> Leavis, 'Anytime', p.175.

<sup>120</sup> *ibid.*, p.178.

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*

*literary*. Leavis adds, that '[t]he serious critic's concern with literature of the past is with its life in the present; it will be informed by the kind of perception that can distinguish intelligently and sensitively the significant new life in contemporary literature.'<sup>123</sup> Indeed for Leavis, if literature is important, then what is most important about it is what it 'ought to be in contemporary life'<sup>124</sup>—that is, that there should be such a public who is intelligent and responsive and decisively influential to its reading and reception. Essentially for Leavis, Bateson, 'the editor of a literary review'<sup>125</sup> ought also to have these beliefs.<sup>126</sup>

Bateson, in his reply to Leavis, admits that due to personal circumstances in which ill health had forced him to compose his piece in a hospital ward, there are passages in his 'Function of Criticism of the Present Time' that are 'ill-considered or clumsily expressed'.<sup>127</sup> 'But is it', Bateson appeals, 'taken as a whole, the absolute nonsense'<sup>128</sup> that Leavis claims it is? Arguing that Leavis had (again) exaggerated the article's deficiencies, Bateson's defence is that to attempt a coherent position in twenty-six pages naturally runs the risk of occasional over-simplifications, and in that sense even 'Arnold's classical essay'<sup>129</sup> is guilty of such. Bateson then begins his composition of defence by noting that Leavis's first paragraph suggests that *Essays in Criticism* was set up to expose and combat the unscholarliness of *Scrutiny*. Bateson states that in matter-of-fact the founders of *Essays in Criticism* are all admirers of *Scrutiny*, and simply wished to set up a journal at Oxford that could perform as

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<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> For Leavis, it is worth noting, where there is an intelligent public, and a good education in place – 'then literature can matter as an influencing factor in realms where critics are not commonly important, or do not count for much.' Leavis does not give an example as to the particular realms in question, but does add that in contemporary cultural society where such conditions offer no such faith to the critic, Bateson's claim that the critic holds an important role in de-muddling the masses is 'trifling and self-deceiving.' Bateson, 'Present Time', p.23. Leavis stresses, in an unrelenting charge, that Bateson's essay fails to note that he (Leavis) has in fact done more both in terms of 'relating literary criticism with other studies and disciplines', and in 'defining its importance for any one seriously concerned with the problems of contemporary civilisation'. Leavis concludes his piece by reminding Bateson, that in *Education and the University* (1943) he does pay critical attention to wider concerns, but that 'what matters most about a mainly literary review is its performance in actual literary criticism'. Leavis, 'Anytime', p.175-176.

<sup>127</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1953. 'Anytime Reply', *Scrutiny*, XIX, 4, (Cambridge: CUP) p.317.

<sup>128</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*

‘brilliantly’<sup>130</sup> as *Scrutiny* at Cambridge. While it is true, he adds, that *Essays in Criticism* aspires to a higher level of scholarship than *Scrutiny*; this is less important than the serious interest *shared* by both journals. Bateson then highlights Leavis’s claim that in the whole of *Scrutiny*’s twenty-year life ‘its judgments have invariably turned out to be right’,<sup>131</sup> this Bateson regards as absurd (*‘quod est absurdum’*). On this note of Leavis’s ‘exaggerated claim’,<sup>132</sup> Bateson adds: ‘this is not to deny that *Scrutiny*’s judgments have generally been right (no critic now alive has made fewer mistakes than Dr. Leavis,) or that *Scrutiny*, when it was at its best, was a far better journal than *Essays in Criticism* is now or is ever likely to become.’<sup>133</sup>

Despite the magnitude of this concession, Bateson nevertheless takes note that Leavis had committed half of his article to a ‘minute and sometimes rather niggling examination’<sup>134</sup> of some brief comments he made on passages from Marvell and Pope. Bateson provides the excerpts, and some of Leavis’s commentary on them, and declares that it is ‘clear as houses’<sup>135</sup> that Leavis’s point in making his collocation in *Revaluation* was to suggest that the resemblances in the last line of each passage quoted typified in some way the affinities between Marvell’s and Pope’s poetry. To Bateson here, it is clear that in 1936 Leavis expected the ‘particularity of resemblance to help’<sup>136</sup> the reader to take his point. Bateson then details that as a result, he cannot understand why Leavis should now berate him for attributing to him ‘an interest in the verbal similarity between the last lines of the passages from Marvell and Pope’.<sup>137</sup> Interesting to note in the evolution of the debate, that Bateson, in wanting to attribute ‘verbal’ significance as a central feature of Leavis’s criticism, can

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<sup>130</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> Bateson, ‘Anytime Reply’, p.317.

<sup>132</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *ibid.* While the magnitude of Bateson’s concession is notable in its severity (for this is high praise especially toward an opponent) it is possible that it can simply be attributed to genuine feeling of truth on Bateson’s behalf. That is to say, there may have been no ‘strategic’ reason for the concession.

<sup>134</sup> Bateson, ‘Anytime Reply’, p.317.

<sup>135</sup> *ibid.*, p.318

<sup>136</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *ibid.*

therefore articulate an angle by which to point out how, in a striking example, words assume different meanings in different periods. It is expressed by Bateson that Leavis makes persuasive and acute elaborations on the two passages, but that essentially, he talks around Bateson's actual essay as opposed to directly and legitimately refuting it. By this, Bateson refers to the fact that his argument was two-fold: '(i) that, as Marvell used the words *head* and *heart*, the sense-impression predominated, whereas for Pope the words were primarily conceptual, and (ii) that the general linguistic trend represented by these passages had resulted here in a distortion or enfeeblement of the poetic argument.'<sup>138</sup> With regards to (i) Bateson says that Leavis fails to dispose of its validity through showing that there are non-sensuous elements in Marvell's poems, because non-sensuous elements appear also in the emblem books. For Bateson, the emblem books demonstrated the type of convention of which Marvell was writing; thus supporting his view that 'influence' could be identified as present. Referring then to Leavis's reading of Pope, Bateson believes, equally, that Leavis's 'face could have been saved had he paid the most perfunctory attention to the context of Popes lines'.<sup>139</sup> The central thesis of Bateson's article outlined a frame-work of defence against Leavis's refutation (or as Bateson viewed it, his 'attempt'<sup>140</sup> at a refutation):

My mistake, according to Dr Leavis, is that by introducing this notion of context I am abandoning 'something determinate—something indubitably *there*' (p.174) for something indeterminate. 'The poem', he says, 'is a determinate thing; it is *there*', whereas 'there is nothing to correspond—nothing answering to Mr Bateson's "social context" that can be set over against the poem, or induced to establish itself round it as a kind of framework' (*ibid.*). Dr Leavis does not explain, however, in what sense the poem is *there* (where *there* is). I imagine he must mean that the poem, as we meet it on the printed page, consists of certain specific words arranged in a certain determinate order. But strictly speaking, of course, there is nothing *there*, nothing objectively apprehensible, except a number of conventional black marks. The meanings of the words, and therefore a fortiori the meaning of the whole poem, are emphatically not *there*. To discover their meaning we have to ask what they meant to their author and his original readers, and if we are to recover their full meaning, the connotations as well as the denotations, we shall often find ourselves committed to precisely those stylistic, intellectual and social explorations that Dr. Leavis now

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<sup>138</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> *ibid.*, p.317.

deplores. There is no alternative—*except to invent the meanings ourselves*.<sup>141</sup>

This excerpt (like the one to follow) reflects in its central posc re the axis of contention between Leavis and Bateson, in that it highlights Bateson's view that Leavis's approach to literary evaluation opens 'the door to subjectivism'; that is, to a literary exploration that depends upon the 'remoteness'<sup>142</sup> of the particular poem to the reader, and as such 'contextual readjustment' is to be understood as present and inevitable at all times. Furthering this point, Bateson states:

Dr Leavis's further complaint that the explorer 'may go on and on—indeterminably' has more basis. I suppose we are all reluctant in reading Marvell to follow Miss Wallerstein back to the Fathers—or Miss Tuve, in reading Herbert, into the intricacies of medieval service. But the whole point of the contextual apparatus that I proposed in my article was to simplify the reader's problems by showing the final dependence of the various levels of context on what I called the 'social context'. I was not piling up unnecessary difficulties so much as trying by formulation of an *organon* to prevent the serious reader from succumbing to the time-wasting temptations to ingenious mis-reading now dangled before us by the most talented contemporary critics, English and American, including very occasionally Dr Leavis himself.<sup>143</sup>

Leavis's rejoinder begins by acknowledging that Bateson had been ill and in a hospital ward at the time of composing his 27 page 'Present Time' essay. For Leavis, however, this was an insufficient excuse for the essay's shortcomings in that the essay had come with the claim that it had received the backing of the editorial board at Oxford. In such a circumstance, stated Leavis, where Bateson had been ill it should have been the duty of his colleagues to ensure that the quality of the work had not deteriorated. But a greater concern for Leavis was the fact that after having 'exposed',<sup>144</sup> the errors of Bateson's essay, Bateson's reply, instead of recognising Leavis's points, served only to further its claim that it had a 'defensible and sufficiently well-considered'<sup>145</sup> point to make. This justified for Leavis reason for continuing

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<sup>141</sup> *ibid.*, p.320. (Bateson's italics).

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*, p.320.

<sup>143</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> F.R. Leavis, 1953. 'Rejoinder', *Scrutiny*, XIX, 4, (Cambridge: CUP) p.321.

<sup>145</sup> *ibid.*

debate, as did Bateson's continuing belief that scholarship was 'superior'<sup>146</sup> to criticism. For Leavis Bateson's reading of Marvell and Pope as well as *Essays in Criticism*'s general output had already demonstrated 'with a truly remarkable conclusiveness'<sup>147</sup> that such scholarship 'can only promote an incapacity to read poetry'.<sup>148</sup> Bateson's 'incapacity to read poetry', continued Leavis, stemmed from his confusing preoccupation with interpreting material from beyond the poem itself. Indeed, Bateson's reading of Quarles and the Emblem books, in Leavis's view, had led Bateson to a distorted reading of Marvell; distorted because he had become determined to demonstrate how Marvell had undertaken a 'crude exemplification',<sup>149</sup> of other work in the period. The effect of this in Leavis's view was that instead of reading the poem for what it was—'a superlatively successful poem of an extremely original kind',<sup>150</sup> Bateson had attempted to deprecate its value.

Leavis's concern with Bateson's reading of Pope also brings up some notable issues, as can be gathered from Leavis's sarcastic and clearly irritated following comments:

The nature of Mr. Bateson's reliance on scholarship is perhaps, if not so astonishingly, even more revealingly exemplified in his fresh demonstration upon Pope. He has caught me out!—this time (the happy confidence speaks in his prose) there can be no question:

'It will not be necessary to refute Dr. Leavis's analysis in detail. All I need do is to quote the first sentence of the Pope-Warburton note on these lines'.

All he need do!—the scholar-critic knows of the note that tells us authoritatively the official meaning of the lines, he produces the note, and that settles the matter. It will not be necessary to read the lines. And in his assurance of the finality of his piece of scholarship he remains still happy about his assertion that 'slave', 'vassal' and 'dupe' are 'virtually interchangeable', as also are 'Bounded', 'narrow'd' and 'contracted' ('These tautologies can't have been *meant* by Pope'.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> *ibid.*, p.322.

<sup>149</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *ibid.*, p.323

Bateson's reading, as Leavis observes it, depends too heavily upon a 'contextual interpretation',<sup>152</sup> (Leavis uses the term pejoratively) of the Warburton-Pope note. But Leavis points out that he too had read the note, and though that may come as a surprise to Bateson, the significant point is, that having read it, he found 'nothing essential',<sup>153</sup> that he 'hadn't already gathered from the text itself'.<sup>154</sup> This at first comes across as slightly conceited in what would appear to be an implied suggestion by Leavis that he does not require support from outside of the text, and that he has the ability or 'intelligence' to identify all relevant and necessary contexts from the process of close analysis itself. But Leavis's point is one of principle; in having found 'nothing essential' what he means is that nothing—in his opinion—*could be* essential that is not in itself a part of the text. Leavis expresses it this way: 'I say 'nothing essential', since I assumed—and assume still—that how such a text is to be read, and how much (or how little) such a note helps towards the attainment of a right reading, must be determined finally by a study of the text.'<sup>155</sup>

From here Leavis goes on to defend his reading of Marvell and Pope in more detail than I can afford to analyse in this chapter. If I am to summarise Leavis's principal points of conclusion, however, I should note that three emerge above all else both in recurrence and emphasis. The first being that he felt Bateson's charges against him were indicative more so of the myopic and limited nature of Bateson's own 'scholarly' approach rather than any ideological short-coming in his own critical position. With this Leavis declares that Bateson had not offended him in the way the Oxford scholar suspects he may have, and that ultimately, his challenge was not 'even a serious challenge'.<sup>156</sup> The second important issue to note is that of Leavis's decision to 'not write in too great a length'.<sup>157</sup> This, however, was not

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<sup>152</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *ibid.*, p.324.

<sup>156</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> *ibid.*, p.325.



merely for reasons of practicality *per se*; rather Leavis made it clear that to do so would inevitably lead to an engagement with matters of an epistemological nature (a point noted by Storer<sup>158</sup> and by Guy and Small.) Indeed, though he felt strongly that he was correct and Bateson incorrect, Leavis was aware that his argument was beginning to resemble one that sought the rejection of extrinsic context in an almost absolute sense. In Leavis's case (as I will discuss in chapter 5) it is unlikely that he wished to promote a method with quite such formalist extremity; rather it was Bateson's 'irritating'<sup>159</sup> championing of the opposite—a vast 'apparatus'<sup>160</sup> of 'contextual interpretation'<sup>161</sup> — that brought out of Leavis a strong defence of the text as an entirely self-sufficient entity.<sup>162</sup> That Leavis may not have applied

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<sup>158</sup> Storer states 'Bateson challenged Leavis on this particular phrase, and Leavis recognises that it opens up a theoretical issue, an opportunity for a 'plunge into epistemology' – epistemology meaning the study of how we are able to know anything; in what sense the poem is 'there' for us to know. To a certain extent he tries to get round this by making it appear that the poem's *thereness* is something natural and obvious, so the 'plunge into epistemology' is unnecessary.' Storer, p.93. R. Storer quotes F.R. Leavis 1953. 'Anytime Rejoinder', p.319. Guy and Small state equal concern with the absence of epistemological consideration or resolve in noting that: 'The exchange between Leavis and Bateson is marked by a failure to relate the *particular* case of value-judgments in English to the *general* case of value-judgments in disciplines of knowledge.' Guy and Small, *Politics and Value*, p.75.

<sup>159</sup> Leavis, 'Anytime Rejoinder', p.324.

<sup>160</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> *ibid.*, p.325.

<sup>162</sup> Whether the type of 'contextual' consideration that Bateson promotes in the process of evaluation should be used in the analysis of a literary text is an undeniably difficult theoretical issue that extends in complexity as a dispute dependant on wider philosophical problems relating to fundamental concepts of literary art. Leavis it would appear seeks to elevate the work of art above the factors surrounding its creation. His approach to study and criticism therefore centres on the internal analysis of structure and language, viewing the literary text as an almost free-standing autonomous object and promoting the notion of an artistic composition as a self-sufficient entity. The idea of 'keeping distanced' the study of the related or otherwise 'context' in the study of a text is an attempt almost to separate a *work of art* from the extended consideration of the social, historical and political circumstance of the author. Leavis's approach therefore, although respectful of artistic composition as an autonomous entity, nevertheless suffers from its rejection of extrinsic information, particularly, in regard to devices as Bateson indicates in Marvell and Pope, of parody and imitation and so forth, which can be unidentifiable without extrinsic knowledge of intent. Leavis's approach also suffers from an inability to construct cross-referential evaluations of the author; and in this case with regard to Pope, such an example is the Pope-Warburton note. However, whilst it would seem incumbent to view such little regard for context as limiting, such a removal of extended contextual consideration—though severe in its principle—is able as a result, to provide definition and principle to the art of criticism, through a frame-work of intrinsic textual boundary. On the other hand, Bateson's approach appears more inclusive as a methodology. But as Leavis argues, is it a methodological approach at all? It has no boundaries, encompassing a 'half-realisation' of intrinsic text with extrinsic study, promoting the analysis of textual linguistics alongside intentional psychology and biographical evidence. Having no boundaries, this approach may appear to possess the type of 'best of both worlds' 'balance' that Bateson argues to be its virtue. However, Leavis's concerns may be justified, in that such an approach, not only doesn't engage with the text sufficiently, it offers little faith in the belief that a text can present its meaning via its own autonomous frame-work. While the furthest exploration of artistic conception may seem the truest and the most sincere way of engaging in analysis, it may equally be argued that there must

such a degree of textual isolation in his own practice, we may evidence in light of that fact that *had* read the Warburton-Pope note. Indeed despite the fact that Leavis claims that his reading of Pope did not avail of the note's information, he still read the note, and therefore any critical decision made with regard to the poem, may (even on a sub-conscious level) have influenced his decisions, understanding, or judgement of it.<sup>163</sup>

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be 'rules' or 'limitations' in order to calibrate each judge, or otherwise such contextual exploration can only remain as subjective as the art it seeks to assess.

<sup>163</sup> Though Leavis doesn't discuss the applied problems of decisions made regarding the inclusion or exclusion of extrinsic evidence, he does appear consider that such critical subjects do suffer from complex theoretical implications. And implications, Leavis states, ultimately lead to a crisis in English studies and literary criticism. However, he furthers this admonition by stating that such a crisis is seldom spoken about because the writers who could write about it, choose not to, because fortune (or misfortune as he sees it) has left them exempt from its immediate consequences upon them; that is to say, they are supported by the educational establishments, intellectual academies, and public media. Thus because they have reached the top of the ladder, there is no longer the prerogative to challenge the theoretical justifiability or foundations of such a ladder's ideological construct.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE LEAVIS-BATESON DEBATE: AFTER 1953

The previous chapters have shown that the Leavis-Bateson debate comprised two specific phases of direct exchange, the first set in 1935 and the second set in 1953. It has also been shown that although this eighteen-year interval was to separate the exchanges, both sets nevertheless centred on the same issues of critical contention; namely the relationship between literary criticism and literary history. Given the fundamental nature of such inquiry and its implications to the study of literature, it is not surprising then that both Leavis and Bateson were to continue to address matters of critical function throughout their respective writing and publications after the debate. The objective of this chapter is to examine these post-debate writings and to observe the underlying theoretical nature of the critical-ideological positions which can be said, in sum, to have divided Leavis and Bateson.

By the last exchange in 1953, Leavis appears to have emerged the victor. Bateson's own writing in these later years would state that as he 'read and re-read'<sup>1</sup> the exchanges it had become clear that not only was Leavis 'right', but that the 'force' of his argument had since played a 'crucial' role in his own 'literary education'.<sup>2</sup> Though Bateson on more than one occasion had expressed the desire 'to please Leavis',<sup>3</sup> his various expressions of Leavis's triumph<sup>4</sup> were evidently more than a tribute of lip-service or a desire to please, and from 1953 to 1978, Bateson, in several notable ways, can be seen to utilize the lesson or

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<sup>1</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1964. 'Alternative to *Scrutiny*', *Essays in Criticism*, XIV, 1, 10-20. p.12.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>3</sup> Bateson was 'disappointed not to have pleased Leavis' with his *E.P.E.L.* thesis. F.W. Bateson, 1978. 'F.R.L. And *E n C*: A Retrospect', *Essays in Criticism*, XXVIII, 4, 353-361.p.355. Bateson referred to himself as the 'lesser man' because he 'thought it would please Leavis. Bateson, 'F.R.L. And *E n C*.' p.361.

<sup>4</sup> 'Leavis was right and I was wrong'. Bateson, 'Alternative to *Scrutiny*', p.19. '[Leavis] made me realize that my confidence in the kind of fact-finding represented by *CBEL* was naive, logically untenable, indeed *dishonest*, because it pretended to exclude 'value' from the process of literary communication'. Bateson, 'F.R.L. And *E n C*', p.356.

‘medicine’<sup>5</sup> of ‘Dr. Leavis’s writing as a model of how to combine synthesis with analysis in the study of literature.’<sup>6</sup> Later in the chapter I explore the series of shifts in Bateson’s position, and particularly the degree to which Leavis’s ‘force’ within the debate can be seen to have influenced an almost entire U-turn in his critical-ideology by the end of his career. I focus my attention first, however, on the nature of Leavis’s victory and how it can be seen as particularly significant in terms of revealing the true underlying contention of the debate. In order to make this point clear, I start with Leavis’s essay ‘Scrutiny: A Retrospect’ which was published as the introduction to Maurice Hussey’s collection of *Scrutiny’s Indexes and Errata*. (1963).<sup>7</sup> In the essay Leavis recollected *Scrutiny’s* conception<sup>8</sup> as a journal, in part by presenting a thorough re-statement of its editorial doctrine regarding how literary works and their writers should be evaluated. Given the nature of this focus, the text can be seen to rekindle the matters centrally contended within the debate. Leavis states:

What governed our thinking and engaged our sense of urgency was the inclusive, the underlying and overriding, preoccupation: the preoccupation with the critical function as it was performed, or not performed, for our civilization, our time, and us.<sup>9</sup>

Leavis’s main argument was that the fundamental requirement of an intelligent criticism was ‘the creative interplay of real judgements—genuine personal judgements, that is, of engaged minds fully alive in the present.’<sup>10</sup> His belief that a ‘preoccupation’ with the contemporary intelligence was vital to a proper working of a responsible criticism reflected his position against Bateson throughout the debate and that which informed his central argument in *New Bearings* in 1932. However, while Leavis emphasises throughout ‘RETSP’ that ‘contemporary’ and ‘present’ day values must constitute the guiding light of intelligent

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<sup>5</sup> Bateson, ‘Alternative to *Scrutiny*’, p.19.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Although ‘Scrutiny: A Retrospect’ was published in 1963, it had been written in the August of 1962.

<sup>8</sup> The other focus of the essay centred on technical aspects of *Scrutiny’s* production, editorial arrangements, legislation of membership, initial reception, and publicity.

<sup>9</sup> F.R. Leavis, 1963. ‘Scrutiny: A Retrospect’, *Scrutiny*, XX, 1-24, (Cambridge: CUP) p.2.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p.5.

criticism, he nevertheless makes a significant remark regarding the use of the ‘past’ in critical evaluation. Leavis writes:

[*Scrutiny*] established a new critical idiom and new conception of the nature of critical thought. Its critical attention to the present of English literature was accompanied by an intimately related revaluation of the past — for the attention paid to the past in a sustained series of critiques and essays amounted to that.<sup>11</sup>

While Leavis presents his term ‘intimately related revaluation of the past’ as a valid critical objective, it is worth recalling that he had vehemently refuted Bateson’s proposed ‘reconstruction’ of ‘original historical setting’ (i.e. a poem’s ‘religious, political, and economic factors’) as an ‘illusory’ aim.<sup>12</sup> A similar type of contradiction is seen in the fact that Leavis is happy to propose a method in which ‘the present of English literature’ is ‘accompanied’ by consideration of the past, however, he had deemed Bateson’s proposal of a ‘critical balance’<sup>13</sup> between historical scholarship and practical critical approaches as fallacious. This latter refutation stemmed from Leavis’s belief that whatever a scholar may deem important about the past, would in fact stem from a contemporary critical decision made in the present, and would therefore be ‘essentially literary criticism’.<sup>14</sup> This means, as far as Leavis was concerned, that Bateson’s literary history did not (independently) exist in its own distinct evaluative right, in the sense that, its aims, and the values of its practice, would be sufficiently incorporated or subsumed into the expected critical duties of the ‘intelligent critic’.<sup>15</sup>

If Leavis’s argument is valid, and a true reconstruction of original setting and ‘social context’<sup>16</sup> is an ‘illusion’,<sup>17</sup> then his accounting for *Scrutiny*’s success as being due in part to its intimate consideration of the past appears to depend considerably upon an emphasis of

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> F.R. Leavis, 2008. ‘The Responsible Critic or The Function of Criticism at Anytime’, *Scrutiny*, XIX, 4, (Cambridge: CUP) p.173.

<sup>13</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1953. ‘The Function of Criticism at the Present Time’, *Essays in Criticism*, III, 1, 1-27, p.25.

<sup>14</sup> F.R. Leavis, 2008. ‘A Review’, *Scrutiny*, IV, 1935-1936, (Cambridge: CUP) p.96.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p.97.

<sup>16</sup> Leavis, ‘Anytime’, p.174.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

semantic distinction. This can be seen elsewhere in examples such as that between ‘reconstruction’<sup>18</sup> and ‘revaluation’,<sup>19</sup> whereby the latter suggests a methodological stress on an assessment of the past, on the basis that this is a more achievable aim than attempts to reconstruct a genuine or true knowledge of historical context. These terms and their implied connotative differences thus serve to suggest that although Leavis and Bateson factored ‘the past’ into the mechanics of their ideologies with different measures of emphasis, the argument that they held diametrically opposing positions, appears, at least to a certain extent, to dissolve behind certain nuances of connotation. The term ‘intimately related revaluation’ is merely one example of what appears to be an inherent characteristic of Leavis’s unspecific<sup>20</sup> style of persuasive discourse. The most consistently used terms by Leavis within the debate, such as ‘intelligent reading’,<sup>21</sup> ‘contemporary sensibility’,<sup>22</sup> ‘genuine’<sup>23</sup>/‘personal’,<sup>24</sup> ‘real judgments’<sup>25</sup> and ‘engaged minds’,<sup>26</sup> are, like his term ‘intimately related’, pre-engendered with associations of established and traditionally reinforced high critical values.<sup>27</sup> There are several argumentative advantages to this for Leavis. One is that a non-committal on the specificity of such terms places him in a position to (A) pre-suppose any perceived *virtues* of Bateson’s argument as incumbent within the ‘high-values’ of his own (such as in the *virtues* of Bateson’s scholarship being assumed as incumbent in the task of criticism), and (B), safely highlight any perceived *flaws* in Bateson’s argument without the risk of necessarily contradicting any particular specification presented in his own. In several instances where

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<sup>18</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1934. *English Poetry and the English Language: An Experiment in Literary History*, (Oxford: Clarendon) p.vi.

<sup>19</sup> F.R. Leavis, 1936. *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin in assoc. with Chatto & Windus), p.1.

<sup>20</sup> The unspecific nature of Leavis’s language is discussed in greater detail in chapter 5.

<sup>21</sup> Leavis, ‘A Review’, p.97.

<sup>22</sup> Leavis, ‘Anytime’, p.179.

<sup>23</sup> Leavis, ‘A Review’, p.97.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p.99.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p.101.

<sup>26</sup> F.R. Leavis, 1932. *New Bearings in English Poetry: A Study of the Contemporary Situation*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin in assoc. with Chatto & Windus), p.11-12.

<sup>27</sup> See chapter 5 p.3. and chapter 5 (*fn.*23).

Bateson requests<sup>28</sup> further specification or elaboration on what Leavis means by certain terms, the emphasis is seldom on Leavis to commit to an expression of exactly *what* they mean, their justification *as* values, *how* they can be achieved, or furthermore, how their achievement could be *measured* within disciplinary practice.<sup>29</sup>

A further demonstration of this point, though it emerges from a slightly broader context, can be seen when analysing Leavis's 'Valuation in Criticism' (1966), an essay which directly addresses the issue of determinable and verifiable standards and criteria in literary criticism. The essay begins with Leavis's statement that: 'You can't discuss "valuation" intelligently except in a general account of the nature of criticism',<sup>30</sup> and furthermore, that 'you can't profitably discuss the "standards" of criticism apart from the purposes and the methods, or apart from the actual functioning of criticism in the contemporary world.'<sup>31</sup> The admonition that mere 'theory' in the 'abstract' sense 'can amount to little',<sup>32</sup> when approaching the field of literary 'standards and criteria',<sup>33</sup> is a particularly interesting view in relation to several works of post-Structuralist theory that emerged in-and-around the same time.<sup>34</sup> The principal connection between these works was that they examined the value of applying theoretical approaches to the understanding of literary criticism in both its function as a performative act and as a discipline of knowledge.

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<sup>28</sup> 'Dr. Leavis does not explain, however, in what sense is *there* (wherever *there* is)'. By 'real judgment', 'Dr. Leavis is in fact opening the door to sheer subjectivism', Bateson, 'Anytime: A Reply', p.318. Another observation of Bateson's with regard to the nature of Leavis's proposed evaluative approach is that in 'such an approach...there is no alternative but to invent the meanings of such terms for ourselves', Bateson, 'Anytime: A Reply', p.320.

<sup>29</sup> See chapter for argumentative consequence of challenging established assumptions and values and the possibility that Leavis's argument comprises an 'appeal to tradition'.

<sup>30</sup> F.R. Leavis, 1966. 'Valuation in Criticism', *Orbis Litterarum*, 21, 61-70, p.61.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p.62.

<sup>34</sup> The 'anti-philosophical' stance of Leavis's essay appears rooted in several key concerns that were soon to re-emerge in the post-Structuralist theory of Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Lacan. Whilst many works classified under the term 'post-Structuralism' held complex and competing critical assertions; a clear, certain, and important parallel nevertheless can be drawn between Leavis's essay and several essays by the deconstructionist literary critic and theorist Paul de Man. In an essay entitled 'Criticism and Crisis' (1967) de Man explores the value of a purely 'theoretical' approach in establishing disciplinary standards and principles with a similar focus on the matter as that presented in Leavis's essay.

A notable parallel of this can be seen in Paul de Man's essay 'Criticism and Crisis' (1967) where de Man asks: 'Is criticism indeed engaged in scrutinizing itself to the point of reflecting on its own origin? Is it asking whether it is necessary for the act of criticism to take place?'<sup>35</sup> These questions, de Man felt, whilst abstract, and thus seemingly unprofitable in their immediate application to the practice of evaluative criticism, were nevertheless unavoidable in any true 'authentic'<sup>36</sup> consideration of the critical function. For De Man, just as for Leavis, three primary or initial levels of critical 'activity'<sup>37</sup> were distinctly apparent. The first of these was literature itself (for example, a poem, novel, or play). The second was the performance or act of criticism in which a literary work was subject to an evaluative response, and ultimately to a 'judgment'<sup>38</sup> made upon the deemed basis of its merit or value. The third was that of a tertiary criticism more commonly distinguished as theoretical criticism or literary theory, in which the performance of the critical act, and the principles and criteria of the critical performance, became subject to analysis. In the case of Leavis's 'Valuation in Criticism' essay and throughout his debate with Bateson, the main focus was on how criticism (the act of evaluation and judgment) could be made 'more 'objective'', and by implication, more authoritative.'<sup>39</sup> However, where de Man and several other notable theorists conclude that an inherent and unassailable 'crisis' exists in any attempt to apply the subjective process of critical performance to a field of discipline or standards,<sup>40</sup> Leavis

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<sup>35</sup> Paul de Man, 1983. *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge) p.8.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Translated from the Greek language to the English as 'judgment', the word 'criticism' can therefore, at least in this etymological sense, be understood to mean the judgment of literature. See Martin Gray (ed.) 1984. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Longman)

<sup>39</sup> Josephine Guy, and Ian Small, 1993. *Politics and Value in English Studies: A Discipline in Crisis?*, (Cambridge: CUP) p.75.

<sup>40</sup> Guy and Small write: 'poststructuralist programmes are negative rather than positive in their attitude towards authority. Unlike structuralists, who were and are concerned with new methods of authorising literary judgments (including those of structuralism). The consequence of this strategy is that post-structuralist concepts of what would constitute an appropriate mechanism of intellectual authority remains relatively unelaborated—it is implied in a method of critique rather than positively argued for within the general context of disciplinary knowledge. In this respect, post-structuralists exhibit something like the same weakness inherent in Leavis's and the New Critic's work . . . [The] distinguishing feature, then, of most post-structuralist approaches to the



argued differently, ‘insisting’<sup>41</sup> that it *was* possible to vindicate ‘the legitimacy of literary criticism as a specific discipline with its own field of approaches and intelligence’,<sup>42</sup> and furthermore, that it was possible to arrive at ‘sensitive judgments’ regarding how the critical act and ‘standards and criteria’ could be *applied, measured, and validated* in ‘concrete’<sup>43</sup> terms. However, when elaborating on these ‘concrete’ terms, Leavis presents the argument, that criticism, and the application of critical principles to a discipline of practice, must come not from theoretical consideration, but from ‘the living strength of real experience’ and ‘real judgment’,<sup>44</sup> adding that: ‘A real judgment is a judgment that has been really judged’ — it must be ‘personal and sincere’<sup>45</sup> — ‘informed by real critical experience’ and ‘real critical engagement’ with the contemporary scene’.<sup>46</sup> While Leavis demonstrates a highly engaged understanding of the *performative* critical process,<sup>47</sup> the values of ‘real understanding’, ‘intelligence’, and ‘experience’, are nevertheless notably distinct in nature<sup>48</sup> from a statement regarding *how* such values could be applied or measured<sup>49</sup> to a discipline of validity or

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problem of value in the discipline exists in the rejection of the objective/subjective dichotomy which had informed previous responses. This is to say that post-structuralism’s interest in literary value is produced by a perception that objectivity – the search for non-evaluative criteria – is an impossible goal.’ Guy and Small, *Politics and Value*, p.78.

<sup>41</sup> Leavis, ‘Valuation in Criticism’, p.61.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, p.62.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p.61.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, p.62.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, p.63.

<sup>47</sup> Leavis goes on within the essay to present a highly engaged understanding the critical process, particularly on the phenomenological and experiential level. He insists that a judgement *should* be, and *must* be, personal. It must therefore acknowledge its basis as that, and as such, acknowledge that however ‘serious’ and ‘energize[d]’ the ‘conception’ of judgment is, it nevertheless requires, (and furthermore ‘aims’) for ‘exchange’; that is, ‘a collaborative exchange, a corrective and creative interplay of judgments’ with others. (Note, however, that this does not equally equate to critical postulation or theory on an epistemological level) Indeed, the depth of understanding on this level does not in itself conclude or resolve the problem of criticism as it is applied to a system of standards, rules, measures of right or wrong etc. It may be said therefore that Leavis is unable to produce the kind of methodological objectivity that he had exposed Bateson for attempting to do and failing.

<sup>48</sup> Gary Day writes: ‘Leavis refused to define what he meant by ‘life’, except to say that, as it was about growth and change, the demand for a precise formulation was neither relevant nor appropriate.’ Gary Day, 1996. ‘F.R. Leavis: Criticism and Culture’, *Literary Theory and Criticism*, (ed. Patricia Waugh) (Oxford: OUP) p.137. Such an example where critics note that Leavis’s terms were not supplied with specific meaning are prevalent, and as noted, are discussed in chapter 5 when accounting for the ways in which it may be argued that Leavis defeated Bateson in the debate.

<sup>49</sup> The subjective nature of the values Leavis presents, that is, the indeterminate nature of terms such as ‘real judgment’ and ‘real experience’ do not equate to a sufficiently guided expression of *how* such features of the

standards. This is precisely the aspect of methodological omission that characterizes his argument against Bateson. It therefore would seem evident that throughout the debate Bateson appears to have pitched his theoretical efforts against a dual difficulty: firstly, the epistemological problem of attempting to make objective the subjective nature of critical performance for the benefit of a workable disciplinary practice, and second, the strength of Leavis's refutations empowered as they are by free-associations with high aesthetic, but methodologically unspecific, critical values. While this accounts, in part, for Leavis's deconstructive victory over Bateson, Leavis's overall argument suffered inversely in the sense that it failed to offer an actual resolution to the problem of defining methodological standards and criterion in disciplinary practice. This is also the view in Josephine Guy and Ian Small's analysis, where it is stated:

The connection between the objectivity of literary judgments and their intellectual authority was one never actually addressed by Leavis. In fact Leavis only countered half of Bateson's proposition – the assumption that objective literary judgments are possible in the first instance. Leavis omitted to make a coherent argument for the intellectual authority of value-judgments in themselves. Leavis of course did make a strong argument for the authority of the particular values he believed literary judgments to embody, and which he took to be self-evident: 'if you don't see that literature matters for what really gives it importance, then no account you offer...can be anything but muddle and self-delusion.' But to argue for the prestige of literary criticism on these grounds is quite a different matter from arguing that value-judgments in themselves do not compromise the intellectual authority of English studies, and it was precisely this kind of answer that Bateson's original proposition properly required (although Bateson's rejoinder suggests he did not fully realise it at the time). The rightness or otherwise of Leavis's particular values is irrelevant to this more general question. The exchange between Leavis and Bateson is marked by a failure to relate the particular case of the value-judgments in English to the general case of value-judgments in disciplines of knowledge.<sup>50</sup>

Guy and Small's statement in parenthesis that 'Bateson's rejoinder suggests he did not fully realise it at the time' appears to remain equally valid when applied beyond 1953. Shortly after the publication of Leavis's 'Scrutiny: A Retrospect' (1963) Bateson wrote 'Alternative to

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critical act (however inherently present they may be within the process) could be applied to a discipline of validity or standards.

<sup>50</sup> Guy and Small, *Politics and Value*, p.75.

Scrutiny' (1964), an essay which bears no evidence that Bateson had later identified the aforementioned nature of Leavis's victory. In explaining the basis of his critical white-flag Bateson states that Leavis and his associates at *Scrutiny* had achieved 'the *disinterestedness* that Arnold pronounced the essential critical virtue',<sup>51</sup> and that, in reflection:

Scholarship's most serious limitation is that its mode of procedure is analytic. A scholar will date a poem, or track down an allusion, or correct a text, but the analysis that provides the evidence by which such problems are solved is single-minded, almost tautological. The work of literature has remained static in the scholar's mind while the particular research has been conducted, and the new fact that emerges when a conclusion has been reached is merely additional to the work's meaning'.<sup>52</sup>

The statement that scholarly analysis becomes 'additional' to the 'meaning' of a literary work, as opposed to constituting (in its own right) a method of analytical evaluation, re-confirms Bateson's principal shift of position which unexpectedly<sup>53</sup> emerged in 'Present Time'.<sup>54</sup> In 1972, eight years on from 'Alternative to *Scrutiny*' Bateson published two works: a volume of collected essays entitled *Essays in Critical Dissent*,<sup>55</sup> and *The Scholar-Critic: An Introduction to Literary Research*. In the opening pages of the latter Bateson would re-state

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<sup>51</sup> Bateson, 'Alternative to *Scrutiny*', p.18.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Bateson, 'Present Time', p.23. The surprise conclusion of Bateson's 'Present Time' essay (similar, as noted, to the conclusion of his reply to Leavis in 1935, begins with the warning it 'is, not as expected'. By not 'expected' Bateson refers to the fact that it advocates a balance of methods as opposed to singular application of the scholarly method on its own (without textual engagement of the type associated with Leavis's criticism and Practical Criticism).

<sup>54</sup> Prior to 1953 and particularly in *E.P.E.L.* as well as in his ensuing exchanges with Leavis in 1935, Bateson had argued that scholarship, and judgments reached via the scholarly method, should centre on an historical examination of the past. By this Bateson meant a factual consideration of a work's original audience and the socio-political circumstances of the author, the language a work used, and other relevant historical factors surrounding its composition. Bateson deemed this necessary in part because it provided a methodologically objective task for the student of literature as opposed to a dependence upon purely subjective 'personal judgments'. The caveat that this belief is only applicable to Bateson's position up until 'Present Time' is due to the fact that within 'Present Time' Bateson retracted, what Leavis called his 'radical' historicism for what he would term a 'supreme' critical model. This supreme model, in distinction from his former method, promoted a 'critical balance' whereby assessment of a work's external history would be performed *alongside* a practical analysis of the work as an autonomous object. Bateson, in his essay's conclusion, was to express this compromise between contextual scholarship and practical criticism with the *cri de coeur*: 'Let us go to school with both Mr. Empson and Mr. Trilling'. (see chapter 3, p. 64).

<sup>55</sup> Although *E.I.C.D.* was published at this time it should be noted that all essays within it (twenty-four in total) had been written by Bateson throughout various stages of the 1960s. Only two 'Ye gete namoore of me: Chaucer's Merchant's Tale', and 'The Novel's Original Sin: A Lecture' are printed for the first time. As such it provides an understanding of Bateson's critical position as it had developed over the course of twelve years (1960-1972), whereas *The Scholar-Critic*, in its form as a singular doctrine, promoted the complementary balance of scholarly methods with contemporary critical methods.

his belief that literary criticism and literary scholarship were ‘complementary disciplines’.<sup>56</sup> However, in an editorial response<sup>57</sup> to a question contributed to *Essays in Criticism* in the same year, Bateson would also make clear, that whilst he felt the methods complementary, he nevertheless firmly believed that they were distinct in the nature of their particular evaluative function. This became apparent when Roma Gill,<sup>58</sup> an English tutor, well acquainted with Leavis’s work,<sup>59</sup> had written to the editors of *Essays in Criticism* with a concern relating to the teaching<sup>60</sup> of the past from the values and perspectives of the present. Gill specified the nature of her concern by asking: ‘How can we prevent the too easy reading of poets of the past, reading them ‘as we read the living’, without at the same time destroying the meanings that come with the recognition and identification of what is traditional?’<sup>61</sup> Bateson responded with:

Can a poem be read separately as "art" and as "life"? —the answer must surely be that a proper literary response combines both attitudes together. The 'art', however, is historically determined, a mode of aesthetic communication between the particular poet and his original readers or auditors that was right or wrong. The 'life', on the other hand, though it may evolve under pressures from a language and a society, is essentially a total continuum— a mirror of the ways of life, constantly available to all of us.<sup>62</sup>

It can be seen from his response that Bateson did not believe that ‘art’ and ‘life’ were to be ‘read separately’, and as such, his reply entailed that a ‘proper’ response should mobilise an evaluative balance of both methods. However, also evident in the response was the belief that literary criticism held its concern with ‘the ways of life’, whereas ‘literary history’, with the meaning, mode, and aestheticism of the ‘art’. The underlying basis of this position is that

<sup>56</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1972. *The Scholar-Critic: An Introduction to Literary Research*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul) p.vii.

<sup>57</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1973. ‘Editorial Response: As We Read the Living?’ *Essays in Criticism* XXIII, 2, 167-175.

<sup>58</sup> Roma Gill was a Shakespeare and Marlowe scholar, who at the time was a Senior Lecturer at Sheffield University.

<sup>59</sup> ‘As a sixth-former I discovered the poems of Donne and the criticism of Dr. Leavis almost simultaneously: one spoke to me and the other one for me.’ Roma Gill, 1973. ‘As We Read the Living?: An Argument’, *Essays in Criticism*, XXIII, 2, 161-175. P.167.

<sup>60</sup> ‘I want to try to set the balance straight, for myself at least, and in offering thoughts about the reading of Donne’s poetry also raise questions about the teaching of Donne, of the metaphysical poets as a group, and perhaps even of poetry in general, to the undergraduate of the 1970s.’ Gill, ‘As We Read the Living?’, p 167.

<sup>61</sup> Roma Gill’s question in *Essays in Criticism* ends with ‘It is, I submit, the urgent business of any teacher of literature to find an answer to this question. And I confess myself baffled.’ Gill, As We Read the Living?, p 175.

<sup>62</sup> Gill, ‘As We Read the Living?’, p.167.

Bateson had accepted from Leavis, that because all evaluation is performed from the perspective of the present, then the 'life' of the art (though the art be from the past) assumes its significance from the values of the 'living' point at which the evaluation (or reading) occurs. The claim that Bateson's position on this matter had been influenced by Leavis seems likely for several reasons. Firstly, this view of criticism was precisely that which constituted Leavis's argument against Bateson within the debate, and that which Bateson had later reflected he had been wrong to argue against. Another is that four years earlier Leavis (with his wife Queenie Dorothy) had expressed an identical view of criticism in stating that 'the judgments the literary critic is concerned with are judgments about life'.<sup>63</sup> This can be traced more broadly to Leavis's 'living principle'<sup>64</sup> which entailed that:

The purpose of evaluating literature is to keep alive the tradition of the human world, not by admiring its achievements, but by bringing its values, purpose, and significance to bear on the present. The revaluation of literary works revitalizes the linguistic and conceptual resources for thinking about human ends in a rapidly changing world. But the critic's duty is not only to the past, it is also 'to establish where, in the age, is the real centre of significance, the centre of vital continuity.'<sup>65</sup>

While the parallels between Leavis's and Bateson's view of criticism in this regard are clearly evident, Leavis's view that criticism should focus on 'life' only accounts for half of the proposition Bateson made in his response to Gill. Indeed, while Bateson adopts Leavis's view on criticism there is no evidence that Leavis subscribed in equal measure to Bateson's adjoining view that history's role therefore, was to consider 'art'.<sup>66</sup> While doubts have been expressed (particularly by René Wellek)<sup>67</sup> that Bateson could have 'seriously defended'<sup>68</sup> or

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<sup>63</sup> F.R. Leavis and Q.D. Leavis. 1969. *Lectures in America* (London: Chatto and Windus) p.23.

<sup>64</sup> 'The critic maintains that 'living principle'—Leavis's other term for tradition—by making the works of the past live in the present, and by identifying the significant new life in contemporary literature.' Day, 'F.R. Leavis: Criticism and Culture', p.133.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, p.137.

<sup>66</sup> There is no evidence in Leavis's lecture or in his wider writing to suggest that he himself equated the belief that criticism's concern is with life, to mean, or imply, that *therefore* literary history's role was to consider the 'art'.

<sup>67</sup> 'I cannot believe that Bateson could have seen this and could have seriously defended the position that criticism is only about life'. René Wellek, 1979. 'The Literary Theories of F.W. Bateson', *Essays in Criticism*, XXIX, 2, 112-123. p.117.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*

accepted the first proposition (that criticism was about life), or even truly believed in the second (that art was for history), the distinction, as a dual postulate, held key advantages for Bateson. Bateson had lost his argument to the force of Leavis's, and had since 'come to recognise'<sup>69</sup> that literary history, as Leavis's suggested, could not function sufficiently on its own as an independent evaluative method without itself 'essentially'<sup>70</sup> being criticism. As such Bateson may have been seeking to justify a role for literary history; a role of its own value and functional identity distinct that from that of literary criticism. Though Bateson accepted Leavis's 'present-centred'<sup>71</sup> critical values, eventually to an almost full embodiment of its principal basis within his own writing, it can nevertheless, not be forgotten that this was still a concession<sup>72</sup> for him. This would certainly be implied in Patricia Waugh's evaluation that: 'Even in the first few decades of the twentieth century, there was still much resistance to the use of the term 'criticism' to describe the academic study of literature (in the work of prominent literary scholars such as Helen Gardner and F.W. Bateson, for example).'<sup>73</sup> However, by 'relegating'<sup>74</sup> the focus of literary history to the art or object, Bateson was simultaneously able to (A) re-install an independent value to the scholarly function (a value of focus upon the artwork, the 'facts' of the past, and the 'then-meaning',<sup>75</sup> and (B), do so

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<sup>69</sup> Bateson, 'The Alternative to *Scrutiny*', p.12.

<sup>70</sup> Leavis, 'A Review', p.96.

<sup>71</sup> Tae Chul Kim, 2004. 'F.R. Leavis, or the Function of Criticism under Specialist Modernity', *Journal of British and American Studies*. 10, 1, 81-112. p.81.

<sup>72</sup> The difficulty in Bateson's acceptance of Leavis's 'victory' and critical argument, can be seen in such details as the fact that wherever Bateson would praise Leavis, he would always follow his praise a caveat that in some small, but nevertheless worth-mentioning way, Leavis was still in some senses wrong, and he was still right, or that Leavis failed to provide evidence to some of his claims against him, and so forth. Such an example is found in *The Scholar Critic* where on p.21 (*fn.*2) Bateson: 'I made these points in a letter to *Scrutiny*, 4, (1935), 181-5. F.R. Leavis agreed in his reply that he had been 'in the habit of making certain critical comments on the passage that Mr. Bateson criticizes', but he added that, 'Mr. Eliot might reply to Mr. Bateson's criticisms that, as they stand, they combine pedantry and with inaccuracy'. The charge of pedantry invites a repetition of McKerrrow's epigram quoted earlier in this chapter; the inaccuracies, if there are any, have not as yet been specified either by Leavis or by anybody else.' Bateson, *The Scholar-Critic*, p.21.

<sup>73</sup> Patricia Waugh, 2006. 'The Rise of the Professional: Criticism in the Modern Academy', *Literary Theory and Criticism*, (Oxford: OUP) p. 29

<sup>74</sup> Wellek, 'Literary Theories of F.W. Bateson', p.117.

<sup>75</sup> Bateson, *The Scholar-Critic*, p.16.

without having to contradict or challenge Leavis's notion that as 'literature was for life',<sup>76</sup> therefore, 'life', should also be the critical focus.

The nature of Bateson's distinction between literary criticism and literary history may also have emerged from an argument made by E.D. Hirsch in his *Validity in Interpretation* (1967) in which a distinction was made between 'meaning' and 'significance'. Hirsch's argument<sup>77</sup> was that meaning is different from significance, in that the latter, significance, referred to meaning that had been acquired or brought to a text from perspective of the viewer. Hirsch states:

*Meaning* is that which is represented by a text; it is what an author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represents. *Significance*, on the other hand, names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable.<sup>78</sup>

When looking at the connection between Hirsch's argument here, and Bateson's distinction, there are several notes to be made. The first is that it had only been in the previous issue of *Essays in Criticism* that Bateson had reviewed Hirsch's text and paid particular (and favourable) attention to this aspect of its argument. The second is the theoretical parallels themselves. Indeed, if 'significance' meant the relationship between original meaning and that which comes from observation thereafter, for example, from the perception of the observer, then criticism, particularly the present-centric type vindicated by Leavis, was precisely a function of this. Indeed Leavis's stress on the importance of judgments being made from the 'contemporary' and 'living' perspective of the present, would thus mean that irrespective of what a reader or critic brought to a text by way of evaluation made from such a view-point, unless it was to correlate to the 'original meaning', then it would instead be an

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<sup>76</sup> F.R. Leavis: *Criticism and Culture*, p.137.

<sup>77</sup> Wellek notes Hirsch's distinction as 'itself derived from Gottlob Frege's "*Sinn* and *Bedeutung*"' Wellek, 'Literary Theories of F.W. Bateson', p.117.

<sup>78</sup> E.D. Hirsch, 1967. *Validity in Interpretation*, (New Haven: Yale U.P.) p.3.

evaluation of the work's 'significance'.<sup>79</sup> As such, the further the degree to which Leavis argued that present 'living' values should constitute the true functional purpose of criticism, the further applicable Hirsch's interpretational model seems.

Bateson's application of Hirsch's model to the wider distinction between the critical and historical function, nevertheless, comprised an issue of contradiction from an earlier position he held. In 'Alternative to *Scrutiny*', as noted earlier, Bateson had conceded that historical analysis, like criticism, becomes 'additional' to the 'meaning' of a literary work due to the impossibility<sup>80</sup> of retrieving the original meaning of a text without imposing 'significance' in the methodological process of the study itself. This would suggest that the logic of Bateson's new distinction was centrally dependent on a return to his former belief that literary history *could* effectively identify original meaning through knowledge of original context. From my research I have to conclude that this appears to be a direct contradiction. This said it would also appear that a very small window of opportunity, if any at all, existed in which a charge of contradiction could have been put to Bateson. This is because at the time of responding to Gill, Bateson had also begun making strong claims that while literary history, in its general application, may be insufficient in retrieving original meaning, biographical analysis of a writer's historical situation, and intention, could. Indeed, in *EICD* Bateson rejected Wimsatt and Beardsley's 'intentional fallacy' on the understanding that it

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<sup>79</sup> Further understanding of term 'significance' can be found in Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, and particularly the chapter 'Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Reception Theory', 54-90. Eagleton states: 'it does not follow for Hirsch that because the meaning of a work is identical with what the author meant by it at the time of writing, only one interpretation of the text is possible. There may be a number of different valid interpretations, but all of them must move within the 'system of typical expectations and probabilities' which the author's meaning permits. Nor does Hirsch deny that a literary work may 'mean' different things to different people at different times. But this, he claims, is more properly a matter of the work's 'significance' rather than its 'meaning'. The fact that I may produce *Macbeth* in a way which makes it relevant to nuclear warfare does not alter the fact that this is not what *Macbeth*, from Shakespeare's own viewpoint, 'means'. Significances vary throughout history, whereas meanings remain constant; authors put in meanings, whereas readers assign significances.' Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, (Oxford: Blackwell) p.67.

<sup>80</sup> The impossibility here refers to the hermeneutic impasse discussed in chapter 3. Also see Burhanettin Tatar, 1998. *Interpretation and the Problem of the Intention of the Author: H.-G. Gadamer vs E.D. Hirsch*, (Washington: RVP); Seán Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh U.P.); Richard E. Palmer, 1969. *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*, (Evanston: Northwestern U.P.)



forbade ‘any attention to an author’s other writings, his biography or the social order to which he belonged’.<sup>81</sup> Referring to this as ‘obvious nonsense’ the argument may be made that Bateson misunderstood the doctrine. Nevertheless, several essays of his *E.I.C.D.* comprised specific efforts to highlight what Bateson termed, ‘the fallacy of the intentional fallacy’<sup>82</sup>

Though the recovery of original meaning was important for Bateson, he would not agree with certain methods of attempting to *make* meaning available to modern readers, such as through the modernization of spelling<sup>83</sup> and recitations in the original accents of the authors.<sup>84</sup> At the same time he strongly refuted the critical style of William Empson (as he had in 1953<sup>85</sup>) for what he deemed to be a lack of any genuine basis in the history or fact of the work. In between these spectrums of purely subjective reading and an unattainable absolute truth of historical context, Bateson’s argument in both *The Scholar-Critic* and *E.I.C.D.* can be seen to reflect exactly that which he attempted to make to Leavis within the debate. This being, that while the critical, and for that matter, scholarly process, were inevitably subjective, scholarly research of genre, intention, literary history, and social history (‘context’) could nevertheless serve to guide, what would otherwise be a purely subjective evaluation, into one that was rooted, at least to some extent, in an awareness of the fact and real meaning — the *then* meaning<sup>86</sup> of a work. This was a point he had initially expressed back in 1953 when he stated:

As a result of the series of limitations imposed upon word-meanings, and word-associations at the various levels, a final meaning begins to emerge. It can be called the correct meaning, the object as in itself it really is.<sup>87</sup>

Leavis’s attacks throughout the debate were generally aimed at the methods Bateson proposed in how such factual awareness could be achieved in the first place. As such, the

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<sup>81</sup> Bateson, *E.I.C.D.*, p.xv.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*, p.45.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, p.27.

<sup>85</sup> Bateson, ‘Present Time’, p.2.

<sup>86</sup> Bateson, *The Scholar-Critic*, p.vii.

<sup>87</sup> Bateson, ‘Present Time’, p.18.

many shifts Bateson goes through towards the end of the debate and after it, can largely be seen to reflect his continuing efforts to establish a method consistent with the aims of objectivity in evaluation while at the same time acknowledging Leavis's lesson that *reconstructions* of the past were not exempt from subjective critical decisions.

Of all the shifts made by Bateson, one stands out above the others, that being his eventual 'abandoning'<sup>88</sup> of the importance he placed on language and the role it should play in literary analysis. Bateson's insistence on this matter was not to wane from its initial proposal in *E.P.E.L.* or throughout any stage of the exchanges with Leavis. Even in the second phase of the debate in 1953 where his central promotion of historicism as a singularised approach, changed to one of balance, his emphasis on a close analysis of the historical evolution of linguistic patterns and trends remained evident.<sup>89</sup> However, in a paper contributed to *Disciplines of Criticism* (1968) entitled 'Linguistics and Literary Criticism' Bateson would eventually change his view. This is a point Wellek makes in observing that Bateson replaced 'his emphasis on the continuity between language and literature',<sup>90</sup> for a position that centred on the assertion that 'language is only a remote originating factor in critical response'.<sup>91</sup> Bateson's new position, Wellek equates to a diagram that Saussure in his *Cours de Linguistique Générale* called 'le circuit de la parole'.<sup>92</sup> Wellek's point is that this shift from Bateson saw his focus enter the modernist domains of response theory<sup>93</sup> and

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<sup>88</sup> Wellek, 'Literary Theories of F.W. Bateson', p.118.

<sup>89</sup> I have referred in my last chapter to the centrality of this in several of his attacks on Leavis's reading of Marvell and Pope. As previously stated, Empson was not exempt either from claims made by Bateson of linguistic negligence, nor were René Wellek and Austin Warren. A footnote to this effect in 'Present Time' made clear Bateson's belief that Wellek and Austin's *Theory of Literature* was limited due to 'the failure to realize the crucial role played by language in the literary object.' Bateson would continue that 'in its absence the authors have left themselves no firm connection between literature and life. The result is an over-emphasis of the formal elements in literature (rhythm, style, symbolism, genres, etc.), which are considered 'intrinsic', and the disparagement of such 'extrinsic' constituents as ideas and social attitudes'. Bateson, 'Present Time', p.23.

<sup>90</sup> Wellek, 'Literary Theories of F.W. Bateson', p.119.

<sup>91</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> 'The composition of a work of literature starts with an idea in the author's head, is then verbalized and transmitted by physical sounds to the ear of the receiver, who, in inverted order, transmits the physical sounds to be mentalized.' Ferdinand De Saussure, 1955. *Cours de Linguistique Générale*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. trans. W. Baskin. (Paris, Payou) p.28.

<sup>93</sup> Wellek, 'Literary Theories of F.W. Bateson', p.119.

‘reader psychology’.<sup>94</sup> And it is evident that emphasis upon these approaches formed a notable theme not only in ‘Linguistics and Literary Criticism’, but throughout ‘The Scholar-Critic’<sup>95</sup>, several essays in *E.I.C.D.*<sup>96</sup> and also a debate Bateson would have with Roger Fowler.<sup>97</sup> Given the centrality of linguistic emphasis in Bateson’s ideology for over thirty years, the shift would come as a ‘surprise’,<sup>98</sup> but more significantly, it came with an explicit renouncing of integral historicist values. Indeed, Bateson would now claim that ‘to become accessible to us critically, the literature of the past must in fact be translatable into the present tense’,<sup>99</sup> and as such, a degree of ‘anti-historicism is the price that has to be paid for the continuing vitality of an English literary tradition.’<sup>100</sup>

When reflecting on Leavis in his ‘A Retrospect’ editorial postscript (1978) Bateson would state that ‘what had begun in an almost total disagreement ended, as it turned out paradoxically, in the beginning of a sort of friendship.’<sup>101</sup> Recalling that they had only met

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> See Bateson, *The Scholar-Critic*, p.vii, 79-89, 112, 114.

<sup>96</sup> See Bateson, *E.I.C.D.*, p.79 - 89, 112, 114, 154-156.

<sup>97</sup> This new emphasis upon the process of response, which is necessarily individual and subjective, yielded the main argument against the importance of linguistics for criticism in the exchange with Roger Fowler. See Roger Fowler (ed.) 1971. *Languages of Literature: Some Contributions to Criticism*, (London: Taylor and Francis)

<sup>98</sup> Wellek, ‘Literary Theories of F.W. Bateson’, p.119.

<sup>99</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1968. ‘Linguistics and Literary Criticism’, *Disciplines of Criticism: Essays in Literary Theory, Interpretation, and History*. (New Haven: Yale University Press) p.7.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>101</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1978. ‘Editorial Postscript: F.R.L and *E in C*: A Retrospect’, *Essays in Criticism*. XXVIII, 4, 353-361, p.356. Though Bateson would suggest ‘a sort of friendship’ emerged from the dispute, Graham Martin’s account of Bateson’s relationship with Leavis would suggest otherwise. Martin writes: ‘I can perhaps begin by recalling the one and only meeting, so far as I know, between the two most influential English literary critics of the 50s and 60s: F.W. Bateson and F.R. Leavis. As director of a 1956 British Council Summer School, and having been responsible for inviting his distinguished opposite to contribute a lecture, Bateson decided that on Leavis’s arrival at Exeter College, Oxford, where the School was being held, he ought to greet him in person. He was not looking forward to it. In an early editorial contribution to *Essays in Criticism* (January 1952) (*sic*) entitled ‘The Function of Criticism at the Present Time’ he had intended to offer Leavis the hand of literary-critical friendship, only to have the gesture rebuffed by Leavis’s *Scrutiny* reply (January 1953, the last number), ‘The Function of Criticism at Anytime’. So it was agreed that, as an Assistant Director for the School and having as an undergraduate met Leavis, I should effect the actual introductions. Bateson – and, to keep up his spirits, Mrs Bateson – were to wait in the College bar where I was to bring Leavis after meeting him at the Lodge. A steep little staircase descended into the bar’s twilight shade. Reaching the bottom, I turned to Leavis, to ask if I could introduce him to Mr and Mrs Bateson, who were seated a few feet away. Talking one look at Bateson, Leavis stopped in his tracks like a Brahmin confronted with an Untouchable, or as if, say, E M W Tillyard had suddenly materialised in hitherto empty space. Muttering some scarcely audible greeting, he turned swiftly towards a corner of the bar from which no second visible contamination could reach him, where, for after a moment’s exchange with an astounded Bateson, I reluctantly joined him, saying I know not what. A keen admirer of Leavis’s work (it was Bateson, as my tutor, who had early put me on to *New Bearings* and

for the first time ‘1950 or so’<sup>102</sup> but despite their differences they were ‘occasionally able to help each other at a modest level’,<sup>103</sup> Bateson was to set out on a reflection of the debate, made poignant by the fact that Leavis had died 6 months earlier in April 1978. Bateson too, as it turned out, was to pass away before the piece itself had gone to print.<sup>104</sup> As such, constituting the last direct commentary upon the debate by either of its two participants, the ‘A Retro’ centrally engaged with what, for Bateson, were the essential issues ‘all those years ago’.<sup>105</sup> The first was the distinction between literary history and literary criticism. Bateson recalls that Leavis’s attack on the distinction made in his *E.P.E.L.* ‘was in a way the beginning of *E in C*’,<sup>106</sup> because it had made him realize that his ‘confidence in the kind of fact-finding represented . . . was naive, logically untenable, indeed *dishonest*, because it pretended to exclude ‘value’ from the process of literary communication.’<sup>107</sup> In this sense, he was grateful to Leavis for making this clear, but in retrospect, felt it necessary to ask:

Was not ‘fact’ equally indispensable in the critical process? Were not Leavis and I both mistaken on the critical theoretical issue—he in overrating literary criticism as the be-all and end-all, I in that book of mine overstating the case for literary history?<sup>108</sup>

Feeling that the ‘overrating’ and ‘overstating’ in effect represented two ‘biases’ — Leavis’s for criticism, and his own for literary history — Bateson would state that in choosing one, he would, in retrospect, cast his ‘vote for criticism’.<sup>109</sup> In expressing his reason for choosing

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*Revaluation*), this was my first experience of *il puritano frenetico* as he was to be dubbed twenty years later by Italian journalists, much to his dissatisfaction. As for the meeting, such as it was, his entire demeanour announced that it had not happened. How could his earlier exchange with Bateson have justified – in his mind – such behaviour, in one noted for exceptionally courteous public manners?’ Graham Martin, 1996. ‘F.R. Leavis and the Function of Criticism’, *Essays in Criticism*, XLVI, 1, 1-15. p.1-2.

<sup>102</sup> Bateson, ‘Editorial Postscript: F.R.L and *E in C*: A Retrospect’, p. 356.

<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*, p. 356.

<sup>104</sup> At the end of Bateson’s essay the *Essays in Criticism*’s editorial board printed a note reading as follows: ‘It is with profound regret that the editors record the death of F.W. Bateson on October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1978. Editorial add. To Bateson, ‘Editorial Postscript: F.R.L ...’ p. 356.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*, p.359.

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*, p.356.

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*

criticism, the complete degree of Bateson's U-turn from his once historicist position, would become evident. He writes:

The proper way to read anything, especially anything claiming to be literature, is to begin with the *text* and leave the *context*, and all those introductions, footnotes and appendixes until later (if at all).<sup>110</sup>

This 'concession',<sup>111</sup> as Bateson would term it, was followed nevertheless, with what would turn out to be his final statement on the matter of criticism vs. scholarship, that being, that it still seemed to him 'possible and desirable to encourage a university Eng. Lit. man to be both critic *and* historian, or (to put it another way) a *Scholar-Critic*.'<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *ibid.*

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE LEAVIS-BATESON DEBATE: IN WIDER THEORY

My aim in this chapter is to situate the Leavis-Bateson debate's central dispute in relation to wider theoretical inquiry. I begin by developing several observations made in the previous chapter in order to present an understanding of the debate both in terms of its conclusion in the pages of *Scrutiny*, and furthermore, in terms of the view that it left several significant critical questions unresolved. The crux of my argument will be to demonstrate that both criticism and scholarship, as they are presented by Leavis and Bateson, engender three subsidiary issues of methodological and aesthetic dispute; that of the use of extrinsic and contextual information in critical assessment, the availability and value of authorial intention, and the evaluative distinction between a present-centric<sup>1</sup> analysis of literature versus an assessment with emphasis on the original context of a work's composition. In exploring these sub-conflicts as stemming, in large part, from subjective literary values, I aim to examine the degree to which subjective relativism poses a problematic issue to the epistemological status of literary criticism as a discipline and as field of objective knowledge.

In chapters 1 and 3 I made note that Bateson harboured a characteristic determination to be seen as 'demonstrably right.'<sup>2</sup> Cunningham suggests that this can be related to certain competitive tendencies, anxieties, and even animosities, which existed between Bateson and various higher-achieving men at Oxford. Bateson himself stated that his desire for personal triumph also reflected in various conflicts of textual interpretation he would have with his students whereby he would seek to leave them 'limp and bewildered' with historical facts, so

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<sup>1</sup> See chapter 2 (*fn.*83)

<sup>2</sup> Valentine Cunningham, 1979. 'F.W. Bateson: Scholar, Critic, and Scholar-Critic', *Essays in Criticism*, XXIX, 2, 139-155, p.141.

as he could ‘sail in’ with his ‘rival interpretation of the poem or poet’.<sup>3</sup> Considering this aspect of Bateson’s character it would seem unusual for a man of such inclination to surrender as willingly as Bateson did, to Leavis by the end of the debate and in the years after. Indeed despite claims that Bateson was ‘testy’<sup>4</sup> and ‘determined’<sup>5</sup> by nature, there is little evidence of stubbornness either in the tone of his exchanges with Leavis,<sup>6</sup> or in terms of his broader critical and theoretical stance. To highlight this, we may reflect on the fact that in 1934 he held a belief in the value of historical scholarship. By 1953 he changed this view in order to promote an approach incorporating a ‘compromise’<sup>7</sup> of scholarship alongside practical criticism. By 1968 he would retreat even further in stating that a degree of ‘anti-historicism’<sup>8</sup> was necessary to keep criticism relevant and vital to the English literary tradition. And in 1978 (in his very last essay) he would remark, that whilst he felt a work’s ‘context’<sup>9</sup> should be consulted only at the end of a reading ‘(if at all)’,<sup>10</sup> he nevertheless still believed somehow that literary history and scholarship were ‘possible and desirable’.<sup>11</sup> Though aspects of circularity are present in the evolution described above, and though Bateson was not a stranger to taking minor digs at Leavis,<sup>12</sup> he was nevertheless, by-in large, in public apologetic about the debate,<sup>13</sup> openly admiring of Leavis,<sup>14</sup> and often quick to address internal contradictions that emerged in some of his own methodological projects.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1975. ‘Confessions of an Eng.lit. Tutor’, *Pelican: The Magazine of Corpus Christi College*, III, 2. P.21.

<sup>4</sup> Cunningham, ‘F.W. Bateson: Scholar, Critic...’, p.148.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p.149.

<sup>6</sup> The general tone of Bateson’s exchanges were less vitriolic than Leavis’s.

<sup>7</sup> F.W. Bateson, ‘The Function of Criticism at the Present Time’, *Essays in Criticism*, III, 1, 1-27, p.25.

<sup>8</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1968. ‘Linguistics and Literary Criticism’, *Disciplines of Criticism: Essays in Literary Theory, Interpretation, and History*. (New Haven: Yale U.P.) p.8.

<sup>9</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1978. ‘Editorial Postscript: F.R.L and *E* in *C*: A Retrospect’, *Essays in Criticism*. XXVIII, 4, 353-361, p.356.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Bateson enjoyed a some jokes at Leavis’s expense. Cunningham remarks that Bateson ‘was tickled pink by being offered “a double-bed” for himself “and Mrs Leavis” at a North American conference and that he loved chuckling over the story with his audiences.’ Cunningham, F.W. Bateson: Scholar, Critic..., p.145.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Considerations of this sort naturally suggested themselves to me as I read and re-read the important 24-page ‘Retrospect’ that Dr. Leavis has prefixed to the index-volume of the re-issue of *Scrutiny*. It is a more personal, more detailed and explicit account or the *Scrutiny* drama than the unhappy ‘Valedictory’ with which he prefaced

Leavis, who was more austere<sup>16</sup> than Bateson, would less frequently back down on an earlier position. Cunningham relates this to the 'critical totalitarianism of a Leavis who always pretended he never made mistakes.'<sup>17</sup> Cunningham's statement appears a little harsh.<sup>18</sup> The truth may lie more in an understanding that Leavis's critical-ideology (certainly compared to Bateson's) was constructed around less definite terms and therefore, by-effect, such terms (and their connotations) were sufficiently adjusted through a re-contextualisation of what they meant rather than outright abandoning or retreat of original position or principle. Believing this to be the case also, and putting the issue directly to Leavis, Wellek once requested a more precise specification on the meaning of some of Leavis's 'key terms'—such as 'impersonality', 'concreteness, and 'realization'.<sup>19</sup> However, Wellek recalls, that in his reply, Leavis 'refused to make them more explicit'.<sup>20</sup> Alongside Wellek, several Leavisian scholars appear to make a similar observation on Leavis's sometimes vague style. Bilan for example states that 'nothing is more difficult to pin down than [Leavis's] use of the word

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its last number, that for October 1953- That was exactly ten years ago as I write, and I had almost forgotten that I had myself contributed four or five pages of embarrassed self-defence to it. *Cet animal est méchant, quand on l'attaque il se défend*. I had recently attempted then a formulation of *Essays in Criticism's* critical *raison d'être* on which Dr. Leavis's disapproval fell like a ton of bricks in *Scrutiny's* issue for Spring 1953. What it was all about I have never quite understood.' F.W. Bateson, 1964. 'Alternative to *Scrutiny*', *Essays in Criticism*, XIV, 1, 10-20. p.12.

<sup>14</sup> Bateson would openly state 'admiration' of Leavis. In 1978 he would write: 'It is true that my admiration of Leavis was not immediately returned. His long and intelligent review...' p.355. 'Posterity, which will have forgotten me, will surely retain a niche for F.R.L. as one of the most effective propagandists for criticism this country has ever had.' F.W. Bateson, 1978. 'F.R.L. And *E in C*: A Retrospect', *Essays in Criticism*, XXVIII, 4, 353-361.p.355.) p.355, 361.

<sup>15</sup> Cunningham writes that Bateson 'made mistakes...Better still though: for all his desire to be right, he could admit he had once been wrong.' Cunningham, 'F.W. Bateson: Scholar, Critic...', p.152.

<sup>16</sup> That Leavis was austere can be evidenced in several ways. In chapter 2 (*fn*.113) there is a strong suggestion from Paul Dean (and others) that this was the case. A further example is noted in Richard Storer's *Leavis* where it stated that Leavis was very defensive and severe in a long letter to *Essays in Criticism* criticising Fr. Jarrett-Kerr who in an issue previous had contributed a short letter which had 'only been mildly critical of *Scrutiny*'. Richard Storer, 2009. *Leavis*, (London: Routledge) p.91. Also see Cunningham's remarks about Leavis who assumed a belief 'that he never made mistakes'. Cunningham, 'F.W. Bateson: Scholar, Critic...', p.152.. And Donald R. Kelley's view that Leavis was 'notoriously opinionated'. Donald R. Kelley, 1995. 'Intellectual History in a Global Age', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 66, 2, 155-167. p.161.

<sup>17</sup> Cunningham, 'F.W. Bateson: Scholar, Critic...', p.152.

<sup>18</sup> Valentine Cunningham is a notoriously direct critic, often truculent and scathing. I use the word 'harsh' above, however Cunningham shows little hesitancy in lambasting a wide array of writers and critics in his own often colloquial, and informal, critical work. For examples see severe attacks on Paul de Man, Ezra Pound, Harold Bloom, George Eliot, and Harriet Beecher Stowe throughout Valentine Cunningham, 2002. *Reading After Theory*, (Oxford: Blackwell)

<sup>19</sup> René Wellek, 1981. [untitled]. *Modern Language Review*, 76, 1, 175-180. p.177.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*.



“standards”’,<sup>21</sup> and Gary Day observes that ‘Leavis refused to define what he meant by ‘life’ only to say that, as it was about growth and change, the demand for a precise formulation was neither relevant nor appropriate.’<sup>22</sup>

This said, the point to be made, is that throughout the debate, when faced with subjective terms such as ‘close reading’ and ‘intelligent reading’, Bateson was in fact confronted, not with methodological specificity, but rather with ontological<sup>23</sup> critical values,

<sup>21</sup> R.P. Bilan, 1979. *The Literary Criticism of F.R. Leavis*, (Cambridge: CUP) p.50.

<sup>22</sup> Gary Day, 1996. ‘F.R. Leavis: Criticism and Culture’, *Literary Theory and Criticism*, (ed. Patricia Waugh) (Oxford: OUP) p.137. It should be noted, however, that Storer believes that such indictments of Leavis (particularly the argument of Wellek) fail in their nature to ‘adequately’ consider how Leavis ‘intended his words to work’. Storer, *Leavis*, p.9.

<sup>23</sup> Claims that Leavis’s criticism comprised an ontological quality whereby his literary values were often expressed by use of words that held unstable meaning (and thus imprecise and implied ideas) has recently led to a long clash of views between Leavisian scholars Chris Joyce and Richard Stotesbury. The sequence of correspondences between Joyce and Stotesbury began when Joyce published an essay in 2005 (originally a paper at the Leavis conference at Downing College, Cambridge) entitled ‘Meeting in Meaning: Philosophy and Theory in the work of F.R. Leavis’. Joyce’s essay discussed the issue of Leavis’s distinction as a literary critic in relation to his use of “pre-theoretical” evaluative language and wider differences between literary criticism and philosophy: ‘The style of writing in this chapter (“The Idea of a University”) is quintessentially characteristic in a much more important sense than the term “style” would normally suggest: very precise and intensive, and continually referring back to its own assumptions woven into a complex nexus. The key terms include “civilization” and “culture,” the latter appearing, with “tradition,” in various permutations: “humane culture,” “cultural tradition,” “living tradition,” “humane tradition,” “maintaining continuity,” and “cultural sensibility in which tradition has its effective continuance.” It may be argued that Leavis is defining his key terms or first principles by reference to themselves in numerous variant forms. And this is in fact the case. But this is entirely consistent with his perception of the “relationship” between meaning and language. It explains his rejection of theoretical approaches in the sense of first seeking to define one’s underlying principles in general or abstract terms and then superimposing the resultant “diagram” on to the experience of reading a given work.’ Chris Joyce, 2005. ‘Meeting in Meaning: Philosophy and Theory in the work of F.R. Leavis’, *Modern Age*, 47, 3, 240-249. p.241-242. The argument of Joyce’s essay was later further explored in a 2009 contribution to the *Cambridge Quarterly* entitled ‘The Idea of ‘Anti-Philosophy’ in the work of F.R. Leavis’, (38, 1, 24-44). Joyce would claim that whether or not it was accurate to label Leavis a philosopher, or equate or distinguish his criticism from philosophy, his ‘formulation of the idea of ‘anti-philosophy’ had ‘serious bearings on philosophical problems, most obviously in the field of ontology.’ Joyce states that: ‘Leavis is generally viewed as a ‘formalist’ critic in the ‘liberal-humanist’ tradition, that is to say, as having concerned himself with ‘close reading’ of literary texts and their formal properties against an assumed background of broadly shared values. I challenge the restrictive character of this reading, which insufficiently summarises the nature of his interest in – and conception of – the ‘literary’. He was, I contend, a more powerful thinker than has commonly been recognised – much more so than the two critics with whom his name is often linked: Richards and Empson (a significant point in relation to considerations about literary criticism), and very far indeed from exhibiting the kind of pre-theoretical innocence or aversion often attributed to him. It is, I think, at least as true of Leavis as Peter Hacker suggests of Wittgenstein, that he dug down to our most fundamental presuppositions regarding the nature of language: assumptions so basic they escape our day-to-day recognition.’ Chris Joyce, 2009. ‘The Idea of ‘Anti-Philosophy’ in the work of F.R. Leavis’, *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 38, 1, 24-44. p.24. Stotesbury strongly disagreed with Joyce, stating that Joyce’s treatment of how aspects of Leavis’s theory relates to philosophy ‘provides an opportunity for clearing up an important misconception. This is implicit in his claim that “[Leavis’s] thought was . . . very far . . . from exhibiting any kind of pre-theoretical innocence.” According to Stotesbury, ‘Leavis himself, rightly, disclaimed any “theoretical” or philosophical interest in language. It is certainly true that his view of language as “collaborative creativity” is very like that of the later Wittgenstein. However, if both men arrive at the same point, it is from opposite directions; and whether we call the end result “philosophy” or not depends on the route by which it is reached. Leavis’s distinction is to make explicit—to

each with a flexible meaning in their own right and thus perhaps subject to interpretative distortion. While Bateson's uncharacteristic surrender to Leavis's 'force' may be understood as one reason that the debate drew to a close, a related aspect may be that such resignation, was in part, induced by Leavis's presentation of isomorphically established literary and critical values. I suggest that this is possible because of two reasons: firstly, given the unspecific connotation of the words he used, Leavis's values were difficult to attack or refute. If Leavis presented his terms more specifically, detailing certain words in more precise terms, or with necessary contexts of methodological instruction, the effect may have exemplified aspects of antithesis or disagreement with Bateson's views. The second reason is that Bateson, unable to respond to the seemingly universal nature of some of Leavis's values, may have accordingly developed a sense that, as he was unable to disagree, therefore, he was most likely incorrect in his own argument. This, however, is not to dispute the possibility that Bateson *was* wrong in certain fundamental ways.

Indeed, while Leavis may have been unspecific in presenting how certain critical values could be methodologically implemented in critical practice, he was not vague or imprecise in the nature of his of attack where he felt Bateson to be guilty of proposing invalid methodological direction. The most notable example of this, and thus the source of the greatest damage to Bateson's position throughout the entire debate, was Leavis's incisive refutation that genuine 'time-travel' through scholarly methods was an impossible aim. By this Leavis was referring to Bateson's argument which assumed that the literary historical approach could grasp a genuine '*understanding*' (as opposed to '*reproduction*')<sup>24</sup> of the past through a keen scholarly engagement with socio-economic and linguistic historical contexts. The futility of this, Leavis claimed, lay in the fact that such research would still require, in its

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articulate in exceptionally powerful and illuminating terms—truths about meaning and objectivity that we implicitly know and take for granted in our ordinary "pre-theoretical" use of language, and, a fortiori, the evaluative vocabulary.' Richard Stotesbury, 2006. "Theory", *Philosophy and F. R. Leavis: A Caveat*, *Words in Edgeways*, Oct, 18-19.p.18.

<sup>24</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1934. *English Poetry and the English Language: An Experiment in Literary History*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1934) p. v.

methodological approach, a decision made as to what particular aspects of the past were important to the evaluative process. Given this, Leavis argued, the practice of such scholarship would in fact be indistinct in its performative function from literary criticism. While Leavis was principally refuting *Bateson's* definition of scholarship when highlighting this particular hermeneutic obstacle, he extended his point to be applicable to all scholarship by implying that he knew of 'no literary history that doesn't make a show of criticism'<sup>25</sup>—and therefore, no literary history that could be truly regarded as exempt from the value-based evaluative processes of criticism.

Leavis's terminology has a very powerful effect on the debate in the sense that the critical quality of say, 'intelligence' may be valued in an ideographic<sup>26</sup> sense by both parties, but without dialectical specificity, it could equally denote different meaning to both Leavis and Bateson in practice. When we consider too the argumentative 'force' of Leavis's presentation of ontological values alongside the precision of his argument detailed above, whereby he demonstrates literary history itself to be dependent upon criticism, it is not surprising then that many critics including Guy and Small argue that by its end the debate had in effect 'resolved in Leavis's favour'.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, several later statements from Bateson in which he concedes to having been wrong to have argued against Leavis gives the debate a certain distinctiveness from some other similar debates<sup>28</sup> in the sense that resolution (or latent agreement) to some extent, did emerge. However, while words such as 'resolution' may be historically accurate in identifying the debate's conclusion in the pages of *Scrutiny*, no

<sup>25</sup> F.R. Leavis, 2008. 'A Rejoinder', *Scrutiny*, IV, 1935-1936, (Cambridge: CUP) p.186.

<sup>26</sup> The ideographic sense here refers to the fact that the same word ('intelligence' in this example) may be in use by Leavis and Bateson (in the context of dialectic return) however, that what is precisely meant by critical 'intelligence', if explored beyond the initial assumptions and connotations of the word, may hold differing meanings to both parties. Thus the word may be the same, but its implications in a critical context, may not.

<sup>27</sup> Guy and Small do however provide the caveat, as I explore, that whilst resolve emerged in the life-span and context of the debate itself, the issue of objectivity and intellectual authority, was not resolved, and that Bateson's resignation may have been due in part to the fact that he did not identify the methodologically hollow construction of the argument that defeated him. See Josephine Guy, and Ian Small, 1993. *Politics and Value in English Studies: A Discipline in Crisis?*, (Cambridge: CUP) p.75.

<sup>28</sup> There are more examples of debates in which neither party has accepted defeat than there are debates (such as that between Leavis and Bateson) where Bateson eventually conceded that Leavis had been correct.

genuine sense of resolution took place if we acknowledge that the underlying theoretical issues were not resolved.

To understand this claim it is necessary to consider the central issue of the dispute itself. While traditional disciplinary roles, in, say, academia, or in wider literary-critical practice, may serve to construct a functional distinction between ‘literary criticism’ and ‘literary history’, it may equally be said that the terms are in fact empty without a precise definition. In the debate (as well as in the thesis from which the debate ensued) Bateson’s efforts can largely be seen as an attempt to provide such a definition: ‘I devoted more than half my introduction [in *E.P.E.L.*] to defining, or attempting to define, what I conceive to be the essential differences between the two activities.’<sup>29</sup> While it has been made clear already that Leavis disagreed with these ‘essential differences’, feeling that they were constructed upon a fallacy, it is also important to identify the basis of Leavis’s disagreement. To say, for example, as Leavis does, that little distinction exists between scholarship and criticism presupposes a notion of what criticism *is* in order that it can be demonstrated to be distinct from scholarship. Leavis therefore can be seen both to register explicitly and implicitly a view on what makes criticism criticism. The significance of this becomes apparent if we analyse the various definitions he supplies to this effect, together with what Bateson deems scholarship to be. When the terms ‘scholarship’ and ‘criticism’ are understood in this sense it can be seen that they emerge as collective terms comprising a set of subsidiary critical conflicts. These sub-conflicts can be divided into three sets, which represent more precisely the contentions *underneath* the more general, umbrella terms of ‘criticism’ and ‘scholarship’. The first sub-conflict relates to the issue of *extrinsic evidence* and particularly the critical principles surrounding the use of extrinsic evidence in literary evaluation. The second relates to the availability, use, and value of *authorial intention* in critical assessment. The third,

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<sup>29</sup> F.W. Bateson, 2008. ‘A Reply’, *Scrutiny*, IV, 1935-1936, (Cambridge: CUP). p.181.

which can be indistinct from the other two is the conflict between critical approaches promoting a *present-centric* critical perspective versus those with an emphasis upon the *historical* perspective or situation of a text. Despite the debate being understood more commonly as a battle between the critic and the scholar these sub-conflicts point to a more fundamental conflict about critical and scholarly activity.

When considering the attitudes towards the use of extrinsic evidence within the debate, it should be noted that neither Leavis nor Bateson sought to exclude absolutely either extrinsic information or ‘context’ from the evaluative process. In the case of Bateson, it was of course, completely the contrary. He believed that intelligent scholarly consideration of context, even of information from beyond the contours of the text itself, was vital in that it provided towards a true understanding of what lay on the page. The value, therefore, of extrinsic study for Bateson can be understood as the basis of his *E.P.E.L.* thesis, where he argued, to Leavis’s dismay, that the socio-cultural, political, linguistic, and economic factors surrounding a text’s composition were entirely necessary in establishing the meaning of a poem, the poet’s intention, the work’s original (and therefore *truest*) meaning, and ultimately, the work’s literary value in relation to its time and place in English literary tradition.<sup>30</sup>

Leavis’s position regarding the use of extrinsic information is different to Bateson’s in the sense that it did not change so dramatically either in the debate or in the years after. That said critical efforts to understand his position are often made difficult because of what appears to be a more nuanced<sup>31</sup> stance regarding both the value and application of contextual

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<sup>30</sup> This point, while entirely accurate of Bateson’s position at the time, should not be left as a statement of his general critical position as it is important to remember that Bateson completely changed his opinion on the evaluative importance of context by the end of his career.

<sup>31</sup> This difficulty is evident in various hesitant critical assessments made by several Leavisian scholars. His position can be highlighted, however, with help of several useful extracts. Gary Day begins such an understanding by suggesting that distinctions between text and context were not of particular importance in Leavis’s wider critical agenda. Day writes: ‘Leavis’s point is that whereas we have, say, the poem in front of us, we can only ever construct its context in part and imperfectly, and that weakens any explanatory value that may be claimed for it. Yet, we should not assume that Leavis believed that literature existed in isolation from the social-order—quite the contrary. He declared that he did not believe in literary values, that you would never find him talking about them, and that the judgements with which the literary critic is concerned are judgements about life. Leavis’s refusal to distinguish between text and context appears odd, because we take the distinction almost

information in a critical assessment. One study, in which Leavis's criticism is measured both in its similitude and distinction from 'Practical Criticism'—the approach Leavis states as his method of choice in the debate<sup>32</sup>—is Storer's *Leavis* (2009) and particularly the chapter entitled 'Close Reading'. A reading of Storer suggests that one way to understand Leavis's methods is to first consider the difference between '*close* reading'<sup>33</sup> and *closed* reading. The latter, epitomised in the 'experimental projects'<sup>34</sup> of I.A. Richards, entailed denying students any external information such as 'name of author, date, previous critical commentary, etc'. Such an approach, later defended by E.M.W. Tillyard,<sup>35</sup> was seen as valuable in the sense that it produced 'a just if severe test of literary perception'.<sup>36</sup> Within the debate Leavis would state to Bateson that the 'centre of interest'<sup>37</sup> should always be in the literature; the focus, 'always upon literary values'.<sup>38</sup> Here it would appear that certain aspects of the method *were* favourable to Leavis—specifically the focus produced from a concentrated attention upon the literature. That said, as Storer points out, 'total isolation of text from any kind of context'<sup>39</sup>

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for granted. He regards it a false opposition, which reduces literature's role in developing the culture by keeping us in touch with tradition. It is not that Leavis thinks that literature exists in realm apart from the rest of society, only that he has a different understanding, certainly to many contemporary critics, of the part it plays in the wider world. As an embodiment of the finest expression of the language, and an example of what can be achieved with it, literature sets a standard of thought which should be make politicians and the media wary of expecting an educated public to accept their clichés, slogans, and soundbites.' Gary Day, 1996. 'F.R. Leavis: Criticism and Culture', *Literary Theory and Criticism*, (ed. Patricia Waugh) (Oxford: OUP) p.137. Although Day states that Leavis refused 'to distinguish between text and context' several of Leavis's charges against Bateson would appear to suggest, that while he may not have wished to make the distinction in explicit terms, he did so, nevertheless, in principle and implication. One such example is Leavis's statement that 'the text, duly pondered, will yield its meaning and value to an adequate intelligence and sensibility.' F.R. Leavis, 2008. 'The Responsible Critic or The Function of Criticism at Anytime', *Scrutiny*, XIX, 4, (Cambridge: CUP) p.163. I have mentioned in chapter 3 that such a statement bears resemblance to the formalist position whereby the promotion of a text as an autonomous entity is maintained as preferable to viewing the text as an extension of external, or furthermore, externalizing, consideration.

<sup>32</sup> Leavis states that 'some of the most essential can be got only through much intelligent reading of the literary-critical kind, the kind trained in "practical criticism"'. Leavis, 'Anytime', p.163.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Storer, 2009. *F.R. Leavis*, (London: Routledge) p.86.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p.85.

<sup>35</sup> E.M.W. Tillyard was a scholar and literary scholar, Fellow in English (1926–1959) at Jesus College and later Master of Jesus College (1945–1959), Cambridge.

<sup>36</sup> Storer, *Leavis*, p.86.

<sup>37</sup> F.R. Leavis, 2008. 'A Review', *Scrutiny*, IV, 1935-1936, (Cambridge: CUP) p.97.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Storer, *Leavis*, p.87.

was not quite the approach that Leavis promoted.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, for Leavis the *textual* focus was a means in itself of discovering context, and *from* a close reading, a reader could peer outwards into related and significant contexts.

Leavis's aim was to encourage an evaluative process whereby the emphasis was on attaining as close as possible a complete reading of the poem. This point can be seen in *Education and the University* published in 1943 in between the debate's two phases, where Leavis writes:

We can have the poem only by an inner kind of possession: it is 'there' for analysis only in so far as we are responding appropriately to the words on the page. In pointing to them (and there is nothing else to point to) what we are doing is to bring into sharp focus, in turn, this, that and other detail, juncture or relation in our total response; or . . . what we are doing is to dwell with a deliberate, considering responsiveness, on this, that or the other mode of focal point in the complete organisation that the poem is, in so far as we have it.<sup>41</sup>

Storer seems accurate in his assertion that 'close reading', for Leavis, was 'essentially a way of accessing context rather than cutting oneself off from it'.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, Leavis presents the view that not only must context be returned to the essential interest—the text—but that the text itself must also be the *source*, or the *origin* and *starting point* of any recourse beyond the page, while simultaneously maintaining the text as the focal mechanism of critical centrality. What is apparent in Leavis's stated method, however, is a troublesome proximity to what in wider theoretical discourse has been called the 'hermeneutic circle', a term which refers the seeming paradox that the whole can be understood only through an understanding of its parts, while these same parts can be understood only through an understanding of the whole to which they belong.

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<sup>40</sup> Storer notes that Leavis, unlike Richards, *would* permit 'some reference to historical context', assign passages to their authors, and 'texts to their periods'. Storer, *Leavis*, p. 86-87. This would indicate that whilst a focus upon the text was essential to Leavis, the severing of any extrinsic information, was not itself Leavis's aim. As such a more accurate way to describe Leavis's argument in this respect is to say he was against 'external' evidence. This is a delicate point because the emphasis rests on the important distinction between 'external' and 'extrinsic' information. The latter, extrinsic, can be understood in the sense that, while it also refers to a focal point outside of a text, it nevertheless maintains an emphasis on an internal point of centrality from which any such external consideration returns in its critical capacity.

<sup>41</sup> F.R. Leavis, 1943. *Education and the University: A Sketch for an 'English School*, (London: Chatto and Windus) p.70.

<sup>42</sup> Storer, *Leavis*, p.87.

Bateson argues throughout the first set of exchanges that while the textual-centricity of Leavis's criticism places emphasis upon the artistic composition as an autonomous entity, it nevertheless suffers from a rejection of wider contextual information that may be important in the overall judgment of the work's merit even if such intention is not directly apparent in the reading of a text itself. Though the following examples were not given by Bateson in the debate, it could be argued that devices such as, say, parody<sup>43</sup> and sarcasm,<sup>44</sup> may be unidentifiable without external knowledge that the author intended them to exist within the text. While Leavis does not exclude such information as authorial identity to the same degree as Richards or Wimsatt and Beardsley did, his focus on the text nevertheless places him in a situation where he is less able to take account of extrinsic information which some may deem vital to a proper understanding of a work's overall value.<sup>45</sup> This is similar to the issue raised by Bateson with regards to Leavis's reading of Marvell and Pope, in which Leavis's evaluation was accused of not understanding the importance of external knowledge.<sup>46</sup> It is interesting that Leavis, who can be seen to argue the case that subjectivity is inevitable to the critical and scholarly processes,<sup>47</sup> and who was criticised by Bateson for being endlessly subjective, actually appears to hold some notion of critical objectivity, in the sense of proposing some kind of limitation (or boundary) upon the evaluative process. In *Validity and*

*Interpretation* (1967) Hirsch argues that extrinsic evidence is essential to the true

<sup>43</sup> The intention to parody or lampoon – 'If it were known, for example, that William McGonagall intended his pathetic doggerel 'The Tay Bridge Disaster' to be a parody of sentimental poetry—i.e. to be deliberately bad and exaggerated—the work might be reassessed as witty and amusing. The argument might be that only when we know what kind of work it is intended to be, can we evaluate it. These are difficult cases for the anti-intentionalist, who must insist that the parodic quality will show itself in the work and not rest entirely on independent intention.' Peter Lamarque, 2006. 'The intentional fallacy', *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide*, (ed.) Patricia Waugh (Oxford: OUP) p178.

<sup>44</sup> See above (fn.43)

<sup>45</sup> It may be felt that a work's overall value or merit may not necessarily have to be evident in its immediate aesthetic impact.

<sup>46</sup> Graham Martin understands Bateson's claim as the belief that 'Leavis, in proposing similarities between Marvell's verse and Pope's, had failed to recognise that Marvell was relying upon a seventeenth century tradition of pictorial allegory entirely familiar to his readers, of which Pope and his readers knew nothing. Each poet had written within a distinct literary and cultural situation, each conveying to the readers who shared that situation a distinct set of ideas. The verbal and other similarities Leavis claimed were nothing more than the product of his unhistorical reading.' Graham Martin, 1996. 'F.R. Leavis and the Function of Criticism', *Essays in Criticism*, XLVI, 1, 1-15. p.12.

<sup>47</sup> Guy and Small, 1993. *Politics and Value*, p.75.



understanding and appreciation of a text because ‘a text means what its author meant.’<sup>48</sup> He continues that ‘almost any word sequence can, under the conventions of meaning, legitimately represent more than one complex of meaning . . . a word sequence means nothing in particular until somebody means something by it.’<sup>49</sup> Whilst Hirsch accepts that an author’s meaning itself may be ambiguous (where, for example, an author intends it to be) he nevertheless argues that it is important to understand the difference between what a work *can* mean and what a work *does* mean. Similar in this respect to the distinction between ‘meaning’ and ‘significance’ raised in the last chapter, the issue here is the degree to which such an argument may be said to revive the value and importance of the author by placing emphasis on a text’s original intention, or, as Hirsch terms it, the text’s ‘actual intended meaning’.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, in a collection of essays entitled *Beyond Aesthetics* (2001) the philosopher Noel Carroll states that the ‘correct interpretation of a text is the meaning of the text that is compatible with the author’s actual intentions’.<sup>51</sup> Carroll’s argument also considers that readers may have a ‘conversational interest’<sup>52</sup> in literary texts and thus seek to further their understanding of the author’s intentions from evidence beyond ‘the black marks on the page’.<sup>53</sup> Whilst Wimsatt and Beardsley (like Leavis in the debate) argue that there should be no need to seek extrinsic information from outside of the text if the intentions are successfully demonstrated within, they seem unable to draw a line as to what constitutes the boundaries of a text<sup>54</sup> or adequately defend the possibility, that in some cases, intention may be made *non*-apparent in the text.

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<sup>48</sup> E.D. Hirsch, 1967. *Validity in Interpretation*, (New Haven: Yale U.P.) p.23.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, p.34

<sup>51</sup> Noel Carroll, 2001. *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*, (Cambridge: CUP) p.197.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, p.174.

<sup>53</sup> Day, ‘F.R. Leavis: Criticism and Culture’, p.136.

<sup>54</sup> There are many extended problems that arise when defining the boundaries of a literary text. If, for example, the belief is held that evaluation should focus on the text itself as opposed to the text’s surrounding ‘context’, then subsequent questions may include that of whether inter-textual analysis is permitted whereby a literary text is examined in relation to other work, often by the same author, in order to further critical understanding. In answering this question, however, a critic would need to make a decision on several complex matters, one being, whether or not an author’s ‘other work’ should be deemed contextual or fair ground for analysis.

William E. Tolhurst and Jerrold Levinson develop Carroll's theory by arguing that the value of literary work and its meaning can be deduced from 'our best appropriately informed projection of [an] author's intended meaning from our position as intended interpreters.'<sup>55</sup> This suggests that a critic's task is to 'hypothesize' an author's intention from the point of view of a reader 'most prepared and able to hypothesize'<sup>56</sup> as a result of their research into both 'the work's internal structure and the relevant surrounding context of creation'<sup>57</sup>. This 'supported study'<sup>58</sup> in which criticism and historical research are combined to produce 'the best possible'<sup>59</sup> understanding of a work can be seen to reflect the type of approach advocated by Bateson in 1953 as well as that in his *The Scholar-Critic* text of 1972. One of the problems, however, with this seemingly 'best of both worlds' approach as similarly noted in chapter 3, is that once a reader or critic partakes in such an exploration, they are unable to make a critical decision to 'forget' or 'unfactor'<sup>60</sup> the influence of external or historical information upon the effects of their evaluative judgement. This disables the possibility of returning to a position of objective or 'uninfluenced' reading as practised in the Cambridge experiments of the 1920s.

Considering the broader history of modern critical theory, we may note that Wimsatt and Beardsley's argument proposing textual autonomy is less thoroughgoing than the formalism of the post-structuralist theories of Barthes, Lacan, and Derrida. That said, on the

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<sup>55</sup> Jerrold Levinson, 1995. 'Intention and Interpretation: A Last Look', *Intention and Interpretation* (ed.) Gary Iseminger, (2<sup>nd</sup> edn). (Philadelphia: Temple U.P.) p.224.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, 226

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> William E. Tolhurst, 1979. 'On What a Text is and What it Means', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 19, 1, 3-14, p.10.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> It would seem unlikely that once external or extrinsic evidence has been consulted that a critical decision could be made to forget or not factor that information into an evaluation once it has become realised. Such examples may include, an author's political or religious position or ideology, or their race, gender, socio-economic class, education, or age. These factors, while in some cases appear as external or possibly even unrelated directly to the intrinsic context of the work, may influence a response or judgment upon the work's value or merit. If for example, a reader was a devout and committed Christian, and read a poem about football to find out that the author had, at a previous time of his life, strongly renounced or criticised people with faith, then it may be possible that the reader may look negatively upon the poem even though it has little or no reflection on anything besides from sport.

other hand, Hirsch's 'defence of the author'<sup>61</sup> also seems moderate by comparison to the theories of critics such as Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels. In *Against Theory* (1985) Knapp and Michaels argued that there was no such thing as 'intentionless meaning'<sup>62</sup> thus challenging even Hirsch's proposal that there is 'a moment of interpretation before intention is present.'<sup>63</sup> In short, Hirsch suggested that a text can mean something prior to the author's execution, but that the willed intention is what supplies meaning to the text. Knapp and Michaels argue that for the creation of 'any sentence there must have been an origin of intention'.<sup>64</sup> The Leavis-Bateson debate is similar in two main ways to the discourse of dispute summarised above. Firstly Leavis felt that Bateson's 'social-context' was too indeterminate as a means for judging a work. 'His discipline is not merely irrelevant; it isn't, and can't be a discipline at all: it has no determinate enough field or aim'.<sup>65</sup> Second, Leavis believed that the process of understanding reversed the process of composition, for instead of starting with author's mental life and proceeding to textual embodiment or projection; it started with the text and worked its way back to its originating mental life; hence, for Leavis, the legitimate basis of a critical stress upon the *text*. A theory which seems to support Leavis's position is T.K. Seung's view that: 'If authorial intention were available for direct inspection and observation by readers, it could readily be used for settling the claims of

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<sup>61</sup> Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, p.2.

<sup>62</sup> Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, 1985. 'Against Theory', *Against Theory: Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism*, (ed.) W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: Chicago U.P.) p.13.

<sup>63</sup> Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, p.56.

<sup>64</sup> While Knapp and Michaels have argued that there is no such thing as 'intentionless meaning', such a belief raises the question of whether they accept that 'meaning' can be produced through linguistic and semantic structures and word combinations. If not, then an interpretational issue occurs in the sense that without relying on language and word associations (over and above intention) we revert to a problem widely termed the 'Humpty-Dumpty fallacy'. Anti-intentionalists (which Leavis's position reflects within the debate) argue that giving 'ultimate authority to private intention collapses into the so-called Humpty-Dumpty theory of meaning, after the character in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* who claimed that when he said 'There's glory for you', he meant 'There's a nice knock-down argument for you'. *Contra* Humpty-Dumpty, intentions alone cannot determine meaning, which must rely to a large extent on publicly accepted linguistic convention. The retrievability of meaning through knowledge of convention is at the heart of the anti-intentionalist case. Of course, the intentionalist might accept a role for convention, but still insist that what makes an utterance of 'That was clever' mean 'That was stupid' must rest partially on what the speaker intended. The matter is complicated further by the fact that sarcasm—when and how it occurs—is itself highly conventionalized.' Peter Larmarque, 2006. 'The intentional fallacy', *Literary Theory and Criticism*, (ed. Patricia Waugh) (Oxford: OUP) p.180.

<sup>65</sup> Leavis, 'Anytime', p.173.

competing interpretations. Unfortunately, authorial intention can be reached only through textual interpretations'.<sup>66</sup> In such a case Leavis's focus on the text may be viewed (certainly by Seung) as equal to, or at least similar, to Bateson's contextual and biographical inquiry, in terms of producing a reflection on what the author intended and what the text means. The issue that a critic faces, however, if this approach is to be implemented, is discussed by Jerrold Levinson: 'if we can...make the author out to have created a cleverer or more striking or more imaginative piece, without violating the image of his work as an artist that is underpinned by the total available textual and contextual evidence, we should perhaps do so'.<sup>67</sup> This is a controversial but interesting area if we reflect upon the potential critical 'consequences'. For example, if, as reader or critic, we are entitled to make the 'best' of an author's work by inferring the cleverest or most impressive meaning, if it so happens that that meaning departs from the author's original intention, then who is the creator of meaning—the author or the reader?<sup>68</sup>

I have explained that Leavis felt that the facts of any given historical period were subject to a critical decision of inclusion or exclusion, and therefore, critical in formulation by their nature. Bateson's later argument asserted that specific contexts (i.e. biography, non-fictional writing, etc) could help determine authorial intention and thus the author's intended meaning. This method would appear at first to counter Leavis's argument, by maintaining that an author may express those particular aspects of his contemporary period, situation, or psychology affected his intentions and reasons for writing, and thus, what he meant. Indeed, Bateson, throughout his two major 1972 publications, explicitly presented the view that biography was more useful in exploring an author's writing than his previous observation of

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<sup>66</sup> T.K. Seung, 1984. *Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, (New York: Columbia U.P.) p.115.

<sup>67</sup> Levinson, 'Intention and Interpretation', p.224.

<sup>68</sup> Is it possible that this may be said of Leavis's reading of Marvell's poem?— the very point that Bateson makes, and claimed, falsely in Leavis's view, that scholarship would not become subject to, due to a focus only on information that can be determined factually.

the wider socio-political context of the work's original period. However, when considered in detail, as Michael Moore suggests, biography itself constitutes complex and uncertain grounds which may in effect serve to destabilize its legitimacy as a method for historical and contextual inquiry. Moore writes:

Though we may expect them to be “[f]ree of literary conventions”, naturalistic and ‘non-fictional’ there is little to really divide a biography from a novel at the point at which a reader encounters them (Pascal, 1960, p. 53). Both are rationalisations of disparate experience, distilled into narrative form. Form is the optimal word, since narrative uses of language are no freer from structural distortion than others. As Arthur C Danto shows, narrative always distorts the events it records, partially because it decides what an “event” is as part of its application of temporal logic to chaotic reality (1962, pp. 154-155). This serves as a warning not to give the label of ‘truth’ attached to an autobiography, biography or other piece of ‘life-writing’ too much credence. The most important thing to remember is that we have no access to the original experience that underlies both the fictional and supposedly non-fictional text.<sup>69</sup>

As such, the value Bateson places on biography as a means of realising authorial psychology and intention seems weakened by the possibility of a similar interpretational ‘distortion’ applicable not only to the processes of composition, but also to the process of reading.

Leavis, throughout the debate, and in much of his wider writing (*New Bearings* being a particular example) held the view that literature should be evaluated in terms of the intellectual and cultural value it holds in its relation to a reader's society. It may be argued that unless Leavis deems ‘present-centric’ criticism to be necessary because of the impossibility of alternative methods (i.e. retrieving true or accurate historical context), then ultimately, his critical decision to view literature in this way, and to perform criticism based on such a view, can be said to stem from personal values, aesthetic choice and preference.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, in deeming that a work should be assessed according to its resonance with the

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<sup>69</sup> Michael Moore, 2011. [unpublished research project], University of Birmingham.

<sup>70</sup> In order to explain this point more clearly in the particular case of the debate, we may consider the following analogy: Leavis wishes to travel in the blue car (present-centric text-based criticism) as opposed to the red car (Bateson's contextual historicist criticism). Although the blue car is already Leavis's preference, it so happens that the engine (methodology) of the red car does not work. Therefore, Leavis makes the point to Bateson that travelling in the blue car is the only way possible of moving forwards.

‘contemporary sensibility’ Leavis appears to accede to a value-based decision about what literature should do, or should achieve.

Indeed, in deeming that a work of literature should be assessed according to its resonance with the ‘contemporary sensibility’ Leavis appears to accede to a value-based decision about what literature should do, or should achieve. I wish at this stage, to make it my argument that this is true of Bateson’s positions as well as Leavis’s, and that such value-based discrepancies constitute the fundamental cause of contest on all the issues throughout the debate. This claim may appear quite vast, that is, to say that every issue of contest in the debate stems from differing ideas relating to what Leavis and Bateson respectively feel literature ‘should do’. But this is precisely the origin of all the critical differences that emerge within the debate. Indeed, one of the aims of this chapter has been to show that while Leavis and Bateson engaged in a dispute that has been commonly classified as one between literary criticism and literary history (or scholarship), underneath those terms were the subsidiary issues of text versus context, intentionalism versus anti-intentionalism, and historical evaluative focus versus a focus whereby literature is examined in relation to the contemporary world. The first point to be made is that all of these issues, as I have shown above, have been examined in greater deal throughout wider literary and critical discourse. The reason for this is that whether they are termed ‘problems’, ‘discrepancies’, or ‘dichotomies’, they constantly emerge where there is discussion on the fundamental nature of literary evaluation. That they have not been resolved, however, is due to the same reason that the Leavis-Bateson debate did not find ‘true’ resolution, that being, that there does not exist a nomothetic truth in relation to critical matters in which it can be confirmed that one position or view-point is more correct than another.

The important characteristic of the Leavis-Bateson then, is not that it failed to identify an ‘undisputable’ or ‘agreed’ means of conducting literary evaluation. Its failure in this respect is in fact what relates it to all other discourses in which similar attempts have been

made. Rather, the debate is significant in that it brings together Bateson's explicit attempt to make the study of literature more objective via establishing contexts of fact and original authorial intention and Leavis's argument that no such factual objectivity can exist, and that those contexts that Bateson's supposes to be factual are actually created via critical decisions. Looking at the debate in this way, the importance of both Leavis and Bateson (as British literary figures) becomes secondary to the vital issue that emerges, that being, the possibility that criticism and approaches to literature are purely critical and therefore purely subjective. If this is true, then the very basis of Bateson's entire agenda is null and void in that the study of literature would be antithetical to objective domains of certifiable truth and fact.

Furthermore while Leavis may have been successful in exposing Bateson's positivist determination as futile, his very success in doing so unearths a paradox which ultimately scuppers his own position. To understand this, it should be first to note, that in proving that no determinable facts could be obtained via Bateson's proposed methods of contextual and historical research, Leavis was left to argue that in the absence of objectivity, criticism must avail of intelligence, careful and close reading, responsibility, and literary knowledge. These terms, and many others he uses, are but metaphysical criterion and the success or otherwise of proving that they have been evident in any given critical performance will itself be a matter of opinion. Moreover, if we take the term 'intelligence' for example, not only is such a 'virtue' difficult to measure or confirm, but that it should be assumed as important at all, is without basis. While Leavis may be applauded in correctly identifying the oversights of Bateson's position, he generally appears to present a succession of dogmatic values in a manner whereby the dogma in itself is often hidden (or clouded) behind a sophisticated expression of said values. It has been argued in several studies that a close connection exists between Leavis's literary criticism and his cultural criticism whereby his socio-cultural view

that the modern world would benefit from the experience and cultural traditions of the past<sup>71</sup> had lead to a view that ‘good’ literature was literature that intrinsically epitomised moral values. However, the subjective problematic nevertheless remains the same in that subjectivity is still applicable to anthropological, social, and cultural beliefs,<sup>72</sup> just as they are to beliefs or ideological positions of an aesthetic nature. The influence therefore of Leavis’s wider moral code upon his criticism does not justify a basis to confirm that his critical ideology is anymore ‘correct’ than an opposing or even antithetical set of values.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Terry Eagleton writes that Leavis, ‘dismissive of ‘literary’ values...insisted that how one evaluated literary works was deeply bound up with deeper judgements about the nature of history and society as a whole.’ Terry Eagleton, 1983. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, (Oxford: Blackwell), p.33. For more information on Leavis’s views on culture and cultural evolution see Guy Ortolano, 2002. ‘Two Cultures, One University: The institutional Origins of the “Two Cultures” Controversy. *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 34, 4, 606-624. Richard Storer, 2009. ‘Culture’, *F.R. Leavis* (London: Routledge). Gary Day, 1996. ‘F.R. Leavis: Criticism and Culture’, *Literary Theory and Criticism*, (ed. Patricia Waugh) (Oxford: OUP).

<sup>72</sup> To some, it is possible that modernisation, hyper-modernisation, scientific-revolution, and technological advancement are deemed positive societal aims despite the type of consequences that may provoke (as with Leavis) a sense of vehement disapproval.

<sup>73</sup> On the use of the word ‘morality’ it is worth noting Terry Eagleton’s observation that: ‘Morality is no longer to be grasped as a formulated code or explicit ethical system: it is rather a sensitive preoccupation with the whole quality of life itself, with the oblique, nuanced particulars of human experience. Somewhat rephrased, this can be taken as meaning that the old religious ideologies have lost their force, and that a more subtle communication of moral values, one which works by ‘dramatic enactment’ rather than rebarbative abstraction, is this in order. Since such values are nowhere more vividly dramatized than in literature, brought home to ‘felt experience’ with all the unquestionable reality of a blow on the head, literature becomes more than just a handmaiden of moral ideology: it *is* moral ideology for the modern age, as the work of F.R. Leavis was most graphically to evince.’ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p.27.



**CONCLUSION:****CONDITION, IMPLICATION, PROPENSITY, AND BAD-FAITH**

This thesis has observed that the Leavis-Bateson debate was a debate of contest and dispute with regard to the function and practice of literary evaluation. Though he would concede to the belief that Leavis had been ‘right’,<sup>1</sup> and that he had been wrong to ‘overstate the case for literary history’,<sup>2</sup> Bateson’s motives were born from a desire to make the evaluation of literature more factual and objective. The positivist posture of the motive can be admired in so far as the consequences of a purely subjective discipline call into question the epistemological justification for the existence of a literary discipline itself. The role of this conclusion is to provide an understanding of why the disagreements occurred between Leavis and Bateson, and the consequence of such disagreements more widely in relation to the study of literature as a field and discipline of knowledge.

I begin then by stating that the crux of contention between Leavis and Bateson can be traced, at its most fundamental level, to differences in what they respectively believe to constitute literary artistic merit. Because Leavis and Bateson were discussing principles of criticism, it may appear questionable that I propose their differences as stemming from discrepancies in ‘literary taste’. However my research has identified a central connection (and inseparable relationship) between what Leavis and Bateson respectively argue to be the correct methods of evaluating literature, and the varying concepts of what they believe literary art itself *ought to be*. As such it is my view that the anatomy of their contention centres on an impasse of literary values and that this impasse of values is neither specific nor particular to their debate, but inherently and consistently identifiable wherever there are attempts to define and calibrate the principles of studying literature.

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<sup>1</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1964. ‘Alternative to *Scrutiny*’, *Essays in Criticism*, XIV, 1, 10-20. p.12.

<sup>2</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1978. ‘F.R.L. And *E in C*: A Retrospect’, *Essays in Criticism*, XXVIII, 4, 353-361.p.356.

Indeed, if history is to understand the Leavis-Bateson debate, it should understand that it centred on a discrepancy, a discrepancy in what Leavis and Bateson believe a work of literature should do, or should achieve in order that it be seen as ‘good’ literature. In this sense, throughout the debate, Leavis and Bateson can be seen as implicitly demonstrating what Paul de man argues to be the inevitable condition of evaluative criticism, which in an essay entitled ‘Criticism and Crisis’, (1967) he describes by stating:

Even in its most naïve form, that of evaluation, the critical act is concerned with conformity to origin or specificity: when we say of art that it is good or bad, we are in fact judging a certain degree of conformity to an original intent called artistic. We imply that bad art is barely art at all; good art, on the contrary, comes close to our preconceived and implicit notion of what art ought to be.<sup>3</sup>

De Man’s premise is that in criticism we make our judgment of a work’s merit or value according to the work’s ‘conformity to an original intent called artistic’. As such, where one expresses their understanding of what they believe literature to be, or when one expresses what they perceive as the merit of say, a novel, a poem, or play, their judgment stems from a ‘preconceived and implicit’ ideological concept of what it is they deem to constitute literary or artistic success. The *condition* therefore of the Leavis-Bateson debate, can be stated in similar terms: whether Leavis and Bateson deem a work to be good or bad, or for that matter, literature at all, depends upon the work’s conformity or proximity to their literary values, and it is these literary values that directly shape and influence how they respectively feel criticism should be practiced. Indeed, in both phases of the debate differing literary values can be seen as central to the critical contention between Leavis and Bateson. One of the main examples of this I have noted in chapter 3 when observing Leavis’s and Bateson’s respective readings of Marvell. For Leavis Marvell’s ‘A Dialogue between the Soul and Body’, was ‘among

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<sup>3</sup> Paul de Man, 1983. *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: Routledge) p.8. De Man’s essay ‘Criticism and Crisis’ was originally delivered as a lecture at the University of Texas and appeared in *Arion* under the title ‘The Crisis of Contemporary Criticism’ in 1967.

Marvell's supreme things, profoundly original, and a proof of genius'.<sup>4</sup> In my view the nature of such a judgment holds little or no value in that it simply requires for a reader to *not* enjoy (in the case of Marvell's poem) an existential or metaphysical consideration of self, for the same work to be felt particularly un-enjoyable or worth less merit than that Leavis bestows upon it.<sup>5</sup> Leavis's verdict seen in his response of superlatives—'supreme' and 'genius'—can ultimately be understood as value-based, and therefore, subjective in nature. His general argument in 1953 on the issue of Bateson's reading of Marvell was that an 'intelligent reader'<sup>6</sup> *should* like Marvell's poem, or deem it to be deserved of merit. Moreover, the particular case of Bateson's failure to do so, in Leavis's opinion, itself highlighted the errors of the scholarly approach and method. The type of critical dogmatism evident in Leavis's writing can be seen throughout wider academic literary practice, often producing, in say an academic environment, an effect whereby a 'failure' to view or respond to a poem in a certain light may reflect unfavourably upon the critical aptitude or capacity of the reader or student. The problem emerges in that it is difficult to see on what basis it could be argued that a particular text or poem (just as Marvell's) can be said or proven to hold an inherent truth of value or merit in which a particular judgement upon it could be taught as a nomothetic truth of knowledge. It will be clear from these statements that the issue of subjective relativism is still evident within the Leavis-Bateson debate, despite the fact that the central engagement throughout was concerned with matters of critical principle, in other

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<sup>4</sup> F.R. Leavis, 2008. 'The Responsible Critic or The Function of Criticism at Anytime', *Scrutiny*, XIX, 4, (Cambridge: CUP) p.169.

<sup>5</sup> Marvell's poem, I believe, is truly wonderful and one of the best poems I have ever read. In that sense I am in complete agreement with Leavis. Nevertheless, my view (though I hold it strongly) that the poem is good is not more important (and cannot be proved more 'valid') than the view of someone who, for whatever reason, thinks it is not a good poem. Even if the person in question was someone who could hardly read, and had not the capacity to consider (or identify with) the existential torment in Marvell's poem, this still does not make their reading of it any less true for them, than my view that it is good, is true for me. Miguel Unamuno's aphorism that: 'Your neighbour's vision is as true for him as your own vision is true for you' is exemplary of this line of perspectivist thought. Miguel de Unamuno, 1972. *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations* trans. A. Kerrigan, (Princeton: Princeton U.P.).p.45.

<sup>6</sup> Leavis, 'Anytime', p.171.

words, with a means of assailing the very problems of subjectivity in a literary-critical discipline.

If Leavis was correct within the debate in his argument that Bateson's proposed methods of literary history stemmed from subjective assumptions regarding literary values (which made such a history 'essentially literary criticism',<sup>7</sup> then the *implication* is that whilst such values maybe felt with true critical determination and belief; to teach or suppose such beliefs as critical or aesthetic *truths* would be to do so without grounds of theoretical justification. The presence therefore of subjective values in a debate of autotelic and meta-critical focus highlights the significant epistemological implications that appear inherent to the construct of literature and literary criticism as disciplines of knowledge. If such subjective variance in perceptions of merit were not inherent to the act of criticism, then all responses to the same literary work would result in the same judgement of its merit. But this does not occur. A concern expressed by William S. Burroughs in a critical essay entitled 'A Review of the Reviewers' analogises this point and precisely identifies the 'crisis' of criticism via a scenario where one reader may look upon a textual characteristic as preferable or good, whilst another reader, may perceive the same characteristic as not good. Burroughs states:

Critics constantly complain that writers are lacking in standards, yet they themselves seem to have no standards other than personal prejudice for literary criticism. To use an analogy: suppose the Michelin Inspectors were equally devoid of consensual criteria for judging food. Here is one inspector... 'food superlative, service impeccable, kitchen spotless', and another about the same restaurant ... 'food abominable, service atrocious, kitchen filthy'. Another inspector strips an Italian restaurant of its stars because he doesn't like Italian cooking. Another would close a restaurant because he disapproves of the chef's private life or the political opinions of the proprietor or complains that the chicken on his plate is not roast beef.<sup>8</sup>

Burroughs asserts that the act of criticism is a performance of 'personal prejudice'. In the analogy he illustrates the consequence of subjectivity in evaluation when he implies that if personal prejudice were to exist as the evaluative criteria amongst Michelin inspectors, then it

<sup>7</sup> F.R Leavis, 2008. 'A Review', *Scrutiny*, IV, 1935-1936, Cambridge: CUP) p.96.

<sup>8</sup> William S. Burroughs, 1985. 'A Review of the Reviewers', *The Adding Machine: Collected Essays*, (London: Calder) p.195.

is possible that conflicting judgments of merit would occur, and that each restaurant would be rated according to the taste of the assessor, as opposed to through a ‘consensual criteria’ for judgement. If we invert the analogy, in order to look upon the central disputes of the debate, we must deduce by the same admonition that the judgements made by Leavis and Bateson—in the absence of ‘consensual criteria’ — cannot be authoritatively or objectively determined as valid or invalid beyond the jurisdiction of a particular set of critical or artistic values. In another essay Burroughs illustrates this absence of concrete criteria upon the functional purpose of a literary discipline, and in doing so, emphasises precisely the issue behind the methodological disagreements between Leavis and Bateson. Burroughs writes:

When Anthony Burgess was teaching his course in creative writing, a student asked him: ‘Why should you be up there teaching writing and not me?’ A good question; and I wish I could give as definite an answer as can be given in regard to other subjects where the technology is more clearly defined. No one, unless he is himself an experienced pilot, asks why the pilot of an airliner should be in the cockpit and not him. The answer is that he knows how to fly the plane and you don’t. Nor would a student of quantum mechanics, engineering, or mathematics ask such a question; the teacher is there because he knows more about the subject than the student. To say he knows more about the subject presupposes that there is something definite to know, that a technology exists and can be taught to qualified students.<sup>9</sup>

The impasse of the Leavis-Bateson debate can therefore be seen, as Burroughs highlights, to stem from the non-existence of a clearly ‘defined’ or ‘definite’ concept of what literature is, and thus, by extension, the means to validate concepts of what literature should ‘do’, and how it should be assessed in relation to what it is supposed it should have achieved. Particularly significant in the excerpt is that Burroughs distinguishes writing and literature from the type of nomothetic or law-like certitude present within the sciences of ‘quantum mechanics, engineering, or mathematics’. Due to the absence of authority on matters of aesthetic nature, Burgess, despite being the instructor, remains void of a basis by which to confirm his concept of what literary art ought to be as more valid or superior to that of his student’s concept.

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<sup>9</sup> William S. Burroughs, 1985. ‘Technology of Writing’, *The Adding Machine: Collected Essays*, (London: Calder) p.32.

While it is unlikely that Burroughs is denying the possibility that Burgess, like Leavis and Bateson, may possess wider reading experience than their pupils; the fact that they may, does not offer resolution to the problem of critical authority. Let us assume, for instance, that a tutor has read more literature than his student, and that due to experience, or cognitive differences, in say, intelligence or aptitude, thus asserts a differing judgement of a work's merit. Ultimately what will have adjusted, through experience, or any other factor, would be the tutor's perception of what literary art ought to be; what it is that constitutes a good feature within a text, or inversely, one that is less admirable. Thus, while it may appear a contentious claim that a tutor's judgement of literary merit cannot be more valid than a student's, it nevertheless remains a sound claim, due to the absence of a concrete law or consensus regarding what it is that constitutes literary merit in the first place.

We may extend understanding of this by considering that in order, for example, to prove a critical judgement of a work's merit to be invalid, there would need to exist a means to do so; a means in which one could verifiably demonstrate that the work deserves a judgement of merit different to that reached in the 'invalid' judgment. The problem in attempting to prove any such critical position, whether it be opposing, or for that matter, in support, is that in the absence of 'something definite to know' one must return to the value-based domain in which the understanding of what characteristics of a text are, say, 'good' or 'bad', depends not on deference to a determinable truth, but rather, on what constitutes good or bad to a particular reader or critic. As such, a definite or *a posteriori* 'truth of merit' akin to, as Burroughs suggests, the type of factual knowledge or universal certitude present in a mathematic equation appears inherently void from the type of knowledge that can be associated with responses or judgments upon the merit of literary art. It is for these reasons that the conflict and nature of dispute between Leavis and Bateson in both in 1935 and 1953

can be understood as epitomic of the evaluative critical *condition* of judgements that stem from subjective values.

The second major observation of my research, following that of the debate's condition, is that this absence of 'something definite to know' has a significant *implication* upon the efforts made to construct fundamental criteria and principles for critical evaluation. In his attempts, for example, to propose standards for evaluation, Leavis argues that literature, in order to be successful, must be observed as at least 'mean[ing] something',<sup>10</sup> and achieving a certain level of 'sophistication'.<sup>11</sup> He continues that, evaluation therefore, should concern itself with whether or not these qualities have been achieved within a work. While these criteria may appear a standard or conservative concept of what literary art must be in order to be good or even distinguish itself from mere 'writing', it is however important to emphasise that Leavis's assumptions should not be mistaken as aesthetic fact, that is to say, as an undisputable criterion or standard inherent to the values of all. We may ask: *why* must a work of literature have to demonstrate sophistication to be successful? *Why* must a work of literature have to mean something? Why should these, or indeed, any other proposals of aesthetic directive assumed by Leavis or Bateson within the debate, necessarily be considered any more serious or important than claims to the contrary which may propose that literature, in order to be good, should *not* appear sophisticated? Even in the scenario that Leavis's criteria were to find universal agreement, that is, were to form or inform the foundational critical values of all, no sooner would a glass be raised in the seeming prosperity of critical unity than it would be thrown in the ensuing dispute of what it is that *constitutes* sophistication. The exact same problems are applicable to Bateson's values. Twenty-five years after his last exchange with Leavis, Bateson would go as far as stating that in retrospect

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<sup>10</sup> F.R. Leavis, 2008. 'Retrospect of a Decade', *Scrutiny*, IX, 1, 1940-1941, (Cambridge: CUP) p.72.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

he would probably ‘cast his vote for criticism’<sup>12</sup> as the most accurate way of classifying the type of method he originally sought to establish as scholarship. The reason I have been cautious in chapters 4 and 5 when referring to Bateson’s ‘defeat’ or Leavis’s ‘victory’ is because Bateson’s concession of defeat, while it gives Leavis victory in the context of the debate, is less significant than the understanding that what lies behind his method (whether termed ‘literary history’, ‘scholarship’, or even ‘criticism’) is a value-based architecture of explicit evaluative preferences. Bateson states:

A poem, for example, is not good or bad in itself but only in terms of the contexts in which it originated. For us to be able to use it, to live ourselves into it, the essential requirement is simply an understanding of those original contexts, and especially the original social context. A social order, as such, is necessarily the affirmation of certain values. In the social context, therefore, the values implied in the poem become explicit, and its relative goodness or badness declares itself.<sup>13</sup>

Bateson’s argument here is that inherent values do not exist within a poem rather they emerge when assessed in relation to the social values from the period of the work’s original composition, and as such an examination of the relative social context is necessary in determining whether a poem is ‘good’ or ‘bad’. Having originally argued that this offers an objective evaluative basis in which to conduct literary assessment, Bateson had disregarded the fact that such an evaluative criterion is itself entirely value-based. The general claim being: that literary art must bear a relation to a given period in history, or that it must appear to be ‘good’ in relation to the values prevalent at the time it was written. Not only is Bateson guilty of aesthetic assumption in supposing that wider social contexts are required in order to ‘realize’ the aesthetic of the work, but a vast array of value-laden ‘non-contextual’ observations made by Bateson essentially contradict his very stance on the matter. One example can be seen in his claim that Marvell’s poem had failed in the sense that its ‘vivid imagery’<sup>14</sup> had ‘resulted in the blurring of the argument’<sup>15</sup> it had intended to present.

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<sup>12</sup> Bateson, ‘F.R.L. And *E in C: A Retrospect*’, p.356.

<sup>13</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1953. ‘The Function of Criticism at the Present Time’, *Essays in Criticism*, III, 1, 1-27, p.19.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p.16.



According to Bateson's own position the case could be put against him that: unless he can factually evidence that to 'blur an argument' is a negative trait—and moreover, considered a negative trait in the original social context of Marvell's poem—then there is no basis whatsoever to assume such a feature of the poem as indicative of an aesthetic failure. What if, say, to 'blur an argument' was thought by someone as a 'good' poetic feature or trait? My point here—that blurring an argument could be an admirable thing—may sound unusual or further still, simply wrong; however, to state that it is unusual or wrong is merely a statement of contrary values, not a statement of critical truth. It may even be said that the more unusual the claim sounds, the more those who disagree with it are indoctrinated by isomorphic and traditionally re-enforced and established literary values. I shall explore this point further below. But what is important to recognise here is that Bateson's response to Marvell, and his judgements upon the merits of Marvell's poetry, stem from an entirely value-based domain. The example I have provided is one of many that would equally demonstrate the same point, not only that Bateson contradicts his principles of 'contextual' dependence, but more importantly, that the foundation of Bateson's literary ideology is rooted in assumptions stemming from personal prejudice. The centrality of this issue to the debate is notable in that the above excerpt on how Bateson felt a poem's merit should be determined was itself the central argument of his 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' essay from which the 1953 exchanges ensued.

Eighteen years earlier the 1935 exchanges ensued from his *E.P.E.L.* (1934) manifesto, and again, despite being a doctrine that promoted 'factual' determination in literary analysis, such purely value-based assumptions regarding literature were present throughout. For instance we may consider the claim Bateson makes when setting out his thesis that 'the better

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

the poet the less likely he is to be the mere mouthpiece of his period.’<sup>16</sup> Again – one must simply ask: what if some believe that a poet *should be* the mouthpiece of their period, or that *being* the mouthpiece of their period is, in itself, what makes the poet a good poet? If the search in literary criticism is for truth—the true value of a text, the true method that best leads to the best judgement on whether the text has been successful—then there is not even a justifiable reason to afford the editor of *Scrutiny* and the editor of *Essays in Criticism* a more significant say over and beyond that which may be expressed by anyone else. That Leavis and Bateson are established figures, in influential roles, whose ‘personal prejudices’ did and continue to hold significance and influence beyond their own critical jurisdiction, however, does have a reason. However this reason is not because their critical or literary ideologies bear a closer proximity to critical ‘truth’, rather it is because of the privilege and power of their respective positions in leading universities and as editors of leading literary journals. Not only were they interpreting literature in their debate, but they were interpreting the best means of approaching literary analysis. But it is as Nietzsche states, ‘All things [including methods of approaching literature] are subject to interpretation, and whichever interpretation prevails at a given time is a function of power and not truth.’<sup>17</sup> The paradox of the debate, as I have discussed towards the end of chapter 5, is that the more it can be said that Leavis proves Bateson wrong in believing that literary assessment can be factual, the more the study of literature requires the ‘cement’<sup>18</sup> of fact and objectivity. Without it, returning to my point above, how can Leavis himself justify or propose that his personal prejudices and opinions regarding literature and critical methods are in anyway significant?

So far in this conclusion, the argument may be put to my thesis that its claim is merely one of relativism, and that my motive is only to stress that criticism and approaches to

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<sup>16</sup> F.W. Bateson, 1934. *English Poetry and the English Language: An Experiment in Literary History*, (Oxford: Clarendon). p.vi.

<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, 2001. *The Basic Writings of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. W. Kauffman, (London: Random) p.70.

<sup>18</sup> F.R. Leavis, 1966. ‘Valuation in Criticism’, *Orbis Litterarum*, 21, 61-70, p.61.

literature are inherently subjective. It may even be said, that to view Leavis's and Bateson's critical positions as holding no extra-ordinary critical significance is even, in a certain sense, disrespectful. But these types of criticism are not important in my view. What is important is whether what I am saying is right or wrong, and in their search for the 'right performance of the function of criticism',<sup>19</sup> it is right to assert that Leavis and Bateson do not adequately consider that a reader may look upon an object or thing as preferable or good, while another reader, viewing the same, may see it as not good and having none of the merit to call it favourable. Indeed, this we call subjectivity; a subjectivity that does not, of course, disappear in our viewing or reading of literary art.

At the same time as Leavis was developing his plans for *Scrutiny* G.N.M. Tyrell published a work entitled *Grades of Significance* (1930), in which he illustrates the same point. Tyrell writes:

Take a book, for example. To an animal a book is merely a coloured shape. Any higher significance a book may hold lies above the level of its thought. And the book is a coloured shape; the animal is not wrong. To go a step higher, an uneducated savage may regard a book as a series of marks on paper. This is the book seen on a higher level of significance than the animal's, the one which corresponds to the savage's level of thought. Again it is not wrong, only the book can mean more. It may mean a series of letters arranged according to certain rules. This is the book on a higher level of significance than the savage's. It might be that for an intelligent being who had never even heard of the art of writing. Or finally, on a still higher level, the book may be an expression of meaning. Each of these is a correct definition of a book in terms of the corresponding background of thought.<sup>20</sup>

While Tyrell's reference to an animal in the excerpt presents a departure from the realm of human phenomenological processes, in doing so, it demonstrates that while distinctions of standards or capabilities inevitably exist, the ultimate or highest critical truth of a work for one, is not necessarily a truth for all. He says that although an animal does not see the possibility of meaning in a book, its understanding of the book as 'a coloured shape' is not

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<sup>19</sup> F.R. Leavis, 2008. 'The Responsible Critic or The Function of Criticism at Anytime', *Scrutiny*, XIX, 4, 1952-1953, (Cambridge: CUP) p.162.

<sup>20</sup> G.N.M. Tyrell, 1947. *Grades of Significance: The Dependence of Meaning on Current Thought*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, (London: Rider) p.29.

wrong, and as such, it is valid.<sup>21</sup> The incremental distinction between types of reading or observation in the excerpt further substantiate belief, not in a valid or correct meaning in a verifiable or inherent sense, but rather a meaning with a closer proximity to a truth that is dependent on the perception<sup>22</sup> of the observer. The implication of this being, that the discrepancy of function between criticism as a performative act of relativist perceptual values and the notion of a critical discipline, is that the latter pursues (in principle and in definition) the assumption that there exists judgements of literary work that are more 'valid' or nearer to the 'truth' of a work's merit than others.

To understand the debate as pointing to an unassailable state or crisis<sup>23</sup> in literary studies would, however, fall short of a potentially wider understanding of the complexity of the matter. Because it is not possible to end disputes of taste without simultaneously terminating the etymologically defined aim of the critical act itself, that being, to evaluate or judge literary work, the study of literature must therefore be understood to exist, quintessentially, as a self-perpetuating impasse of values. It is for this reason that in *Validity in Interpretation* (1967) E.D. Hirsch expresses his doubt over the discipline's potential to produce the kind of knowledge Bateson and Leavis sought in the debate in which a particular

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<sup>21</sup> Although it is more a limitation of his analogy, rather than the validity of his point, it is worth providing a caveat to the effect that Tyrell is unlikely to be sure of what an animal may 'think' about an object.

<sup>22</sup> Tyrell's emphasis on perception is noted and explained by Robert Barry in his *A Theory of Almost Everything*, where he writes: 'In other words, what we 'see' is determined in part by the level of knowledge that we bring with us to the situation, and since acquired knowledge varies considerably from person to person (depending on social and cultural back-ground, experience, interests, and so on) there are inevitably many things which some people 'see' while others cannot. Robert Barry, 1996. *A Theory of Almost Everything: A Scientific and Religious Quest for Ultimate Answers*, (London: Oneworld) p.75.

<sup>23</sup> The word 'crisis' and term 'crisis of methods' have recently found wide-spread usage in modern literary theory. Carol Atherton states: 'The last two decades have witnessed a number of concerns about the existence of a 'crisis' in English studies', a sense that traditional assumptions about the nature and purpose of the study of English literature are being eroded by a version of the discipline that is much more fragmentary and uncertain. This model of a disciplinary development has a tendency to see this 'crisis' as a new phenomenon, brought about by such factors as the rise of literary theory, the expansion of the literary canon, and a concomitant questioning of both the central subject matter of English and the manner in which this body of knowledge is studied and evaluated. Yet behind this model there is also a notion that there was a time when the discipline of English Literature was secure: that there was, at some point, a stable and commonly held set of beliefs about what the discipline should involve, and what it intended to achieve.' Carol Atherton, 2005. 'The Organisation of Literary knowledge: The Study of English in the Late Nineteenth Century', *The Organisation of Knowledge in Victorian Britain*, (ed.) M. Daunt, (Oxford: OUP), p.219.

reading or method can be verified as ‘valid’, or more valid over another. Referring to a tutor in the academic institution, Hirsch asks: ‘On what ground does he claim that his “reading” is more valid than that of any pupil?’<sup>24</sup> With a similar view to that expressed by Burroughs, Hirsch supplies the admonition: ‘On no very firm ground.’<sup>25</sup> This ‘no very firm ground’ highlights the impasse which he argues constitutes the ‘principal cause of the loss of bearings sometimes felt though not often confessed by academic critics’.<sup>26</sup> Hirsch’s observation of a ‘loss of bearings’ stems precisely from the argument here; that being, that due to the subjective nature of literary criticism, a problem of authority exists, whereby, even within an intellectual community, literary establishment, or academic institution, there are no means by which to authoritatively or justifiably confirm validity of a judgment regarding a work’s merit or value. The reference in my introduction to the Latin maxim: *De gustibus non est disputandum*, translated as ‘there is no point in disputing about tastes’ therefore holds a threat to the justification of literary studies as an academic discipline especially if the implication is to be understood as the view that opinions about matters of taste are not objectively right or wrong, and hence, disagreements about matters of taste cannot be objectively resolved. It is for this reason that I referred, in the beginning of my introduction, to Bateson’s initial motive for writing *E.P.E.L.* (1934) as admirable because a set of general principles that unify or calibrate critical perceptions of merit would benefit the consistency of literary criticism as a discipline. However, in practice, as the debate has shown, attempts to construct and agree upon these principles cause conflict amongst critics and theorists.

The features then of the Leavis-Bateson debate that become apparent from my research is that both engage in a contest of literary values—which I term the *condition* of the debate—and as a result, both conduct their arguments, despite the fact that such a condition of subjectivity, has a disciplinary *implication* whereby they are devoid of a means to

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<sup>24</sup> E.D. Hirsch, 1967. *Validity in Interpretation*, (New Haven: Yale U.P.) p.4.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p.5.

certifiably demonstrate or confirm their respective views of critical practice as correct or more correct over that proposed by the other. Another feature of the Leavis-Bateson debate emblematic of discourse that involves an evaluative discussion of literature and literary-critical principles, is that, whilst there may exist no ‘ground’ or ‘basis’ upon which to confirm their critical judgments or ideologies as superior over another’s, there nevertheless exists a *propensity* to uphold certain literary values, and present them as significant beyond the domain of the self. Indeed, the absence of a means to objectively resolve conflicts of literary value does not at any stage within the debate prevent Leavis or Bateson from holding and expressing belief that some writers or works are of more merit and value than other works.<sup>27</sup>

To illustrate the nature of this propensity in wider contexts (to show that the issues central the debate are still relevant in criticism today) it is worth noting that one may, for example, hold a belief that the poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer presents a level of philosophical inquiry and sophistication greater than can be identified in the work of J.K. Rowling. One may, as another example, attest that the writing of George Orwell offers a profundity or moral inquiry in excess of that, say, in a glamour model’s contribution to a make-up magazine; or that the novels of Irvine Welsh provide a social realism more precise and verisimilitudinous than that found in the pages of a Mills and Boon novel. However, irrespective of the degree to which one is able to critically or comparatively demonstrate an argument to support such claims, the question still remains: where does there exist in literary art, or in the discipline of its criticism, a point of concrete authority that confers that such qualities such as; ‘philosophical inquiry’, ‘sophistication’, ‘social realism’ and so forth, necessarily constitute a value of

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<sup>27</sup> The writers that Leavis and Bateson discussed in an evaluative capacity, in order to demonstrate how each would fare in light of their critical approaches, are numerous. In the 1935 exchanges alone (not including those discussed in Bateson’s *E.P.E.L.*) evaluative remarks were made about: Yeats, Eliot, Houseman, the Elizabethan poets, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson, Tourneur, Middleton, Thomson, Young, Gray, Collins, the Metaphysical poets, Pope, Johnson, the Romantic poets, the Victorian Poets, Tennyson, Pre-Raphaelites, Hopkins, Dryden, Waller, Addison, the Elizabethan dramatists, Kyd, Surrey, Cowley, Milton, and Emily Brontë. And in the 1953 exchanges (not including those discussed in Bateson’s ‘The Function of Criticism at the Present Time’ or those discussed in 1935) evaluative remarks were made about: Auden, Spender, Keynes, Coleridge, Huxley, Pound, Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, Caudwell, King, Quarles, and Day Lewis.

literary merit more significant or important than contrary assumptions that may say, good literature, in order to be good, should avoid such features?

Throughout both phases of the debate Leavis and Bateson offer numerous verdicts and judgements upon the qualities and merits of particular poets. In all cases the judgements reached stem from personal values and personal prejudices. The purely subjective nature of these values, however, are less explicit as they may be in standard evaluative discourse, in that within the Leavis-Bateson debate the judgements of taste are somewhat disguised or hidden under the substitutive objective of determining ‘methods’, whereby in the absence of determinable critical truth, the onus shifts to proposals whereby good critical practice is practice that conforms to certain methods of approach. In other words, what makes a particular work of criticism better or more valid than another is not its proximity to the ‘truth’ of a work’s merit, but rather its proximity and conformity to the method by which it is deemed a critic should have went about realising and deducing their judgement. In Hans-Georg Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* (1960) it is stated that: ‘According to Vico, what gives the human will direction is not the abstract universality of reason but the concrete universality represented by the community of a group, a people, a nation, or the whole human race.’<sup>28</sup> Gadamer, via Vico, appears to assert that while organising a discipline or craft of tastes meets an impasse of hermeneutical dead-ends, there equally exists a propensity for a sense of community (‘*sensus communis*’)<sup>29</sup> in which ‘convention’,<sup>30</sup> ‘agreement’,<sup>31</sup> and ‘knowledge’<sup>32</sup> both phenomenological and epistemological can be said to exist according to a discipline in which consensus can be established. Gadamer writes:

In the same way as the English moral philosophers emphasize that moral and aesthetic judgments do not obey reason, but have the character of sentiment (or taste), and similarly Tetens, one of the representatives of the German Enlightenment, sees the

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<sup>28</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, 1975. *Truth and Method*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, (London: Sheed & Ward) p.21.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p.67

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p.66

sensus communis without reflection. In fact the logical basis of judgment –subsuming a particular under a universal, recognizing something as an example of a rule – cannot be demonstrated. Thus judgment requires a principle to guide its application.<sup>33</sup>

This includes an organisation of, if not taste itself, then the methodology by which that taste is principled. A work of literature may therefore, be deemed good or not good, or a critical response, valid or not valid, according to the ‘rules’<sup>34</sup> or ‘principles’<sup>35</sup> that represent a truth of methodology or a ‘concrete generality/universality’.<sup>36</sup> For Gadamer, however, as earlier for Vico in his *On the Study Methods of our Time* (1709) this acknowledgment, admittedly for both, remained troublesome in that an aesthetic ‘concrete generality/universality’ remains ontologically elusive, given its inherent dependence upon judgmental ‘bias.’<sup>37</sup> Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* concludes that we see the world from the perspective of the self, but that despite this there nevertheless exists a propensity to communicate beyond the phenomenological limitation of the self.

In criticism, proposals regarding how a text should be assessed, and what it is that such an assessment should seek to determine or identify from a reading of a literary text, depends itself on what it is believed that a text should have accomplished. The seeming oversight in the Leavis-Bateson debate is that both Leavis and Bateson suppose that their methods and ideas of what literary art should be hold important grounds for consideration even though they have no basis confirm such positions as objectively true. Writing that the word ‘criticism’ originates from the Greek, and translates to the English language as ‘judgment’, Martin Gray, in his *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, defines literary criticism as the ‘interpretation, analysis, classification, and ultimately judgment of a work of literature’.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p.30

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p.40.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, p.74

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p.21. The term ‘concrete generality’ in *Truth and Method* is changed to ‘concrete universality’ in later editions, for example, (London: Continuum) 2004.

<sup>37</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.153

<sup>38</sup> Martin Gray (ed.) 1992. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Longman)



Similarly, J.A. Cuddon in his *Literary Terms and Literary Theory* writes that ‘The art or science of literary criticism is devoted to the comparison and analysis, to the interpretation and evaluation of works of literature’<sup>39</sup> and *The Oxford English Dictionary*; that the ‘function or work of the critic’ is ‘the art of estimating the qualities and character of literary or artistic work’.<sup>40</sup> Significant here is that such definitions indicate that there is at least a modicum of agreement in terms of what the function of literary criticism and the role of the literary critic is understood to be. The debate, however, has shown that as Leavis and Bateson approach literary texts with varying ideas as to what constitutes literary merit they judge the text according to a criterion that is non-universal. In this sense, irrespective of how much discrepancy exists between the values that inform their critical ‘estimation’ of literary merit, in performing criticism that stems from values, neither are betraying the functional—or etymological—objective of criticism, but rather, the value assumptions of each other, and other’s more widely.

What masquerades as ‘fact’ in literary criticism, without actually *being* fact, are the values that have become established to the point where it would seem incumbent to hold them as knowledge as opposed to what they are—assumptions. The significance of this is that both Leavis and Bateson, throughout the debate, can seldom be claimed as establishing a literary ideology that is entirely independent from pre-disposition to canonical and disciplinary influences of values and standards. To hold together the possibility that one may possess a view of the merit of a work of literature, while simultaneously acknowledging, that a verdict of merit is in itself less ‘definite’ than would be necessary to constitute the type of knowledge or fact in other fields, is neither a new dualism nor a new philosophical expectation upon the meta-critical ideology of the critic. Both the Keatsian concept of

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<sup>39</sup> Cuddon, J.A. (ed.) 1999. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn. (London: Penguin) p.196.

<sup>40</sup> Oxford University Press, ‘Criticism,, n.’ *OED Online*. (2010); <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/44598>.

‘negative capability’<sup>41</sup> and Heidegger’s promotion of ‘*Gelansenhait*’<sup>42</sup> in this sense become central to a deeper—if still conflicted—understanding of criticism as a dichotomy of values and as a pursuit of aesthetic truth and knowledge.

A distinction between the inner, biased point of view, and outer, verifiable and factually determinable knowledge was constructed by Plato in his *The Republic*. Plato’s distinction between what he termed the realm of opinion (*doxa*),<sup>43</sup> and the realm of knowledge (*epistēmē*)<sup>44</sup> is represented in the following table which usefully enables an understanding of the difficulties that emerge in type of knowledge that literature and its criticism can be said to elicit.

Figure 1<sup>45</sup>: Plato’s Scheme of Knowledge (*Divided Line*):

Knowledge ( <i>epistēmē</i> )		Opinion ( <i>doxa</i> )	
Intelligence ( <i>noēsis</i> ) or Dialectic	Mathematical Reasoning ( <i>dianoia</i> )	Belief ( <i>pistis</i> )	Illusion ( <i>eikasia</i> )

<sup>41</sup> M.H. Abrams explains that the poet John Keats ‘introduced this term in a letter written in December 1817 to define a literary quality “which Shakespeare possessed so enormously —I mean *Negative Capability*, that is, when man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.” Keats contrasted to this quality the writings of Coleridge, who “would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude ... from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge,” and went on to express the general principle “that with a great poet the sense of beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration.” The elusive term has entered critical circulation and has accumulated a large body of commentary. When conjoined with observations in other letters by Keats, “negative capability” can be taken (1) to characterize an impersonal, or objective, author who maintains *aesthetic distance*, as opposed to a subjective author is personally involved with the characters and actions represented in a work of literature, as opposed also to an author who uses a literary work to present and to make persuasive his or her personal beliefs, and (2) to suggest that, when embodied in a beautiful artistic form, the literary subject matter, concepts, and characters are not subject to the ordinary standards of evidence, truth, and morality, as we apply these standards in the course of our practical experience. M.H. Abrams, (ed.) 1999. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, (Boston: Heinle) p.174.

<sup>42</sup> John Caputo introduces term ‘*Gelansenhait*’ as follows: The ‘ethics of dissemination is also an ethics of *Gelansenhait*—and here we are again letting Derrida draw Heidegger into the *agora*—which means an ethics of letting be...as thinking of willing... releasing...and living without why?’. John D. Caputo, 1987. *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project*, (Indiana: Indiana U.P.) p. 264-265

<sup>43</sup> The distinctions made between ‘Knowledge’ (*epistēmē*) and ‘Opinion’ (*doxa*) are later central within the distinction in transcendental philosophy between *Geisteswissenschaften* and *Naturwissenschaften*, denoting respectively, the human (or social) sciences and the natural sciences. As such, the anti-positivist claim such as in Wilhelm Windelband’s *An Introduction to Philosophy* (1895) is that due to the possibility of the discovery of ‘fact, general relationships, and properties—a “nomothetic”, law-like methodology is present in the natural sciences’; whereas the social and cultural sciences ‘employ an ideographic or individualising procedure’ non-conducive to a factually empirical objectivity. Wilhelm Windelband, 1921. *An Introduction to Philosophy* (London: Fisher Unwin).p.24.

<sup>44</sup> See (fn.35)

<sup>45</sup> Plato, 2003. *The Republic*, trans. D. Lee, (London: Penguin) p.235.

Forms (Intelligible Realm) (to noēton)	Physical (Visible Realm) – Shadows. (to horēton)
ONE – Immutable truth and reality	TWO – Mutable truth and reality

All types of ‘knowledge’ and critical position expressed with the debate fit into Plato’s domain of ‘opinion’, except, that is, for the ‘names, titles, dates, and “facts about”’<sup>46</sup> literary texts central to Bateson’s literary history. While this type of information can be accurately understood as ‘knowledge’ in the true sense of Plato’s ‘truth and reality’, the process of applying such facts in order to deduce judgement of the merit or value of a literary work involves, as Leavis argues, a process of ‘critical decision’.<sup>47</sup> While Leavis is correct in this respect, the understanding that critical responses to literature are essentially opinion solves little in the sense that opinion and values are inherently subject to an ontological and ideographic impasse. One way of understanding this is to consider the ontological problematic in Aristotle’s assertion that: ‘Happiness is the highest good’.<sup>48</sup> In literature, we may understand that the ‘highest good’ is that which equals a literary work’s aesthetic or artistic success or value. Aristotle supplies a caveat to his philosophical proposal that is applicable (and representative) of problems in artistic and critical subjectivity. He states: ‘whilst everyone agrees that the highest good is happiness, they disagree about what happiness is’.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, this is unequivocally the disciplinary caveat we must also, in literature, apply to notions of ‘value’. Even, for example, if one were to believe a poem to be best that is ‘without value’ or of no value to anyone—should they find such a poem and believe it void of value, then its success in being of ‘no value’, would, in effect, constitute for them—its ‘value’. The paradox therefore of the type of disciplinary standards that Leavis and Bateson can be seen as disputing is that on the one hand there exists a propensity to

<sup>46</sup> F.R. Leavis, 2008. ‘A Review’, *Scrutiny*, IV, 1935-1936, Cambridge: CUP) p.96.

<sup>47</sup> F.R. Leavis, 2008. ‘The Responsible Critic or The Function of Criticism at Anytime’, *Scrutiny*, XIX, 4, 1952-1953, (Cambridge: CUP) p.164.

<sup>48</sup> Aristotle, and Anthony Kenny, 2011. *Eudemian Ethics*, (Oxford: OUP) p. 13

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p.13-14.

communicate literary values and judgments of merit within an expressive medium of literary critical dialectic discourse, and yet, on the other hand, there seems no means of validating such judgments given that merit is subjective and value-based as opposed to ontical; meaning, as Heidegger expressed, that of ‘plain facts’<sup>50</sup> such as the nomothetically deductible laws of physics and chemistry. Almost all of the Leavis-Bateson debate operates with a performative incognizance of these vital and fundamental considerations, though, it would seem, this is not because Leavis and Bateson are unaware of them, but rather because engagement with such issues would make the proposal of literary methods, principles, and standards, an act of bad faith.

Indeed, if we are to accept that this absence of a universal truth or consensus regarding what constitutes merit, does not in itself, terminate the *propensity* that exists to communicate or express critical responses or judgments relating to literary merit, then we must equally accept, that these judgments of merit, stemming as they do, from inherently value-based assumptions, can only therefore, maintain, inform, and construct standards of criterion within a literary discipline in a Sartrean mode of *Bad Faith*; that is to say, complicit in an elevation of evaluative standards and values that are not necessarily the values and standards of all. The term ‘bad faith’ (*Mauvaise Foi*) is the central focus of the second chapter of Sartre’s essay on phenomenological ontology entitled *Being and Nothingness* (1943) Sartre provides two examples<sup>51</sup> that illustrate bad faith, both of which are useful when

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<sup>50</sup> Martin Heidegger, 1978. *Being and Time*, (London: Wiley & Blackwell) p.68.

<sup>51</sup> Sartre’s term ‘bad-faith’ (*mauvaise foi*) is explained through two examples which can be used to understand the type of faith that a literary critic or tutor engage in when performing their respective tasks of evaluation or the teaching of literary-critical values. Sartre’s explanations are quite extensive so I shall summarise the first example. Example (1) is that of a woman who reluctantly takes the hand of a man who she does not have feelings for. She does so because she does not want to offend or upset him and because she does not want to have to take action of conflict—in this case, raiding the conflict of her non-love for him, against his love for her. In her mind then she ‘disarms’ the action of holding his hand from ‘sexual’ connotations. Example (2) is that of a waiter in a café who, although first and foremost a man, *performs* the role of a waiter. Sartre states: ‘His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes toward the patrons with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly; his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the customer. Finally there he returns, trying to imitate in his walk the inflexible stiffness of some kind of automaton while carrying his tray with the recklessness of a tight-rope-walker by putting it in a

applied as an understanding of how literary criticism occurs in the absence of what Burroughs describes as ‘something definite to know’. Leavis’s and Bateson’s proposals of disciplinary standards are made in bad faith because the literary ideologies they respectively seek to assert are made despite a simultaneous knowledge that such values do not represent the literary values of all. To suppose their judgment of merit to be correct and other judgments incorrect would be to suppose that correctness ‘exists’ in judgements of aesthetic nature.

In academic institutions tutors are, on one level, aware that the values and criterion they instruct as standards are not absolute in a nomothetic sense. This is especially true with regards to judgements they may encourage regarding the merit and value of work, what work *should* be studied, and the ways in which it should be evaluated. Thus, what occurs in bad faith is precisely, the instruction of values intended as an influencing construct upon the developing literary ideology of the pupil, without simultaneously stressing the relativist origin from which any such evaluative principles stem. The deeper problem, however, emerges in relation to the notion of ‘discipline’, in that—if purely ‘good faith’ were to prevail and a tutor was to focus consistently and only upon the meta-critical justification of the evaluative ideology used to reach judgment; that is, the assumptions from which a judgment stems (and not begin an exercise of values until such justification is reached) then the

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perpetually unstable, perpetually broken equilibrium which he perpetually reestablishes by a light movement of the arm and hand. All his behaviour seems to us a game. He applies himself to chaining his movements as if they were mechanisms, the one regulating the other; his gestures and even his voice seem to be mechanisms; he gives himself the quickness and pitiless rapidity of things. He is playing, he is amusing himself. But what is he playing? We need not watch long before we can explain it: he is playing *at being* a waiter in a café.’ Jean-Paul Sartre, 1991. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, (London: Routledge) p.55,59. In the case of both the woman and the man, they actively engage in a performance aware that the performance in itself is not ‘true’. However this act of bad-faith has its benefits. In the case of the woman, her bad-faith prevents her from the disturbing the serenity of the interactive discourse with her admirer, even though it conflicts with the truth as she knows it. In the case of the man performing as the waiter the performance is deemed essential the necessary application of behaviour to his role as waiter. A critic or tutor perform their roles aware that such roles require promote literary values, literary values that are not ‘true’ or ‘factual’ in an ontic sense, but rather of ‘taste’ and ‘opinion’. Such roles (evaluative criticism/teaching of literary values) however, cannot be undertaken without value-based assumptions taking place. Therefore, if one is aware of these issues, and continues to perform critical evaluation or teach critical values as ‘correct’ or more valid than others, then they are doing so in bad-faith.

evaluative act—although it would occur in bad faith without such justification, could never in fact begin.

In this sense a discipline of literary criticism is similar to a government in power. Where a government may be able to make laws of ethical or moral nature due to its position of political authority, a literary discipline influences aesthetic or literary moral standards (values) through an established, economic, (if not necessarily justifiable or agreeable) position of artistic governance, empowerment, and council. The bones of theoretical contention in this thesis then become evident in the possible responses to such as a question as: is all writing literature? If it were to be claimed, ‘no’, then equally such a claim must entail that some writing *is* literature while other writing, for whatever given reason, is *not*. But then what is it that constitutes literature? What are those qualities or characteristics that make it so? In discussing the ‘function of criticism’ the Leavis-Bateson debate is impassed by the very same question. Indeed, to contend the ‘function of criticism’ or ask ‘what is literature?’ are inversions of the same inquiry in that the proposal of critical principles are made, in the belief that they are most suited to the identification of a work’s success—the assessment by which a work *should* be judged. There are, however, various reasons why the study of literature as a discipline continues anyway with, what may appear at first, a seemingly independent thrust from the ‘abstract’ issue of ‘value-impasse’ highlighted by this analysis of Leavis-Bateson debate. Indeed, it would seem that Hirsch’s observation that issues of validity are ‘seldom spoken of’ are most likely due the consequences such inquiry may have for the discipline.

In *Politics and Value in English Studies* (1993) Josephine Guy and Ian Small suggest that ‘if pursued rigorously’<sup>52</sup> such enquiry may ‘actually place [the discipline] in a crisis more genuine and more profound...one which would logically result in the dissolution of English

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<sup>52</sup> Josephine Guy, and Ian Small, 1993. *Politics and Value in English Studies: A Discipline in Crisis?*, (Cambridge: CUP) p.7.

departments and the disappearance of literary criticism as an academic activity'.<sup>53</sup> While Guy and Small suggest this to be a 'controversial',<sup>54</sup> admonition they nevertheless go on to state that whether controversial or not – it is a real problem, which, even if unassailable does not cease, in itself, to be a problem. For Paul de Man the type of criticism involved in evaluative judgments is distinguished from the type here whereby the justification and principles of criticism itself are evaluated and brought into question. De Man calls this type of criticism 'Authentic criticism',<sup>55</sup> and states that: 'Whether authentic criticism is a liability or an asset to literary studies as a whole remains an open question. One thing, however, is certain; namely that literary studies cannot possibly refuse to take cognizance of its existence. It would be as if historians refused to acknowledge the existence of wars because they threaten to interfere with the serenity that is indispensable to an orderly pursuit of their discipline.'<sup>56</sup>

In a lucid sketch of the practical manifestation of unresolved theoretical disputes, John Lennard introduces his *The Poetry Handbook* (1996) with the following remarks:

Some teachers make no distinction between practical criticism and critical theory, or regard practical criticism as a critical theory, to be taught alongside psychoanalytical, feminist, Marxist, and structuralist theories; others seem to do very little except invite discussion on 'how it feels' to read poem x. And as practical criticism (though not always called that) remains a compulsory paper in most English Literature A-levels and Scottish Highers, and most undergraduate English courses, this is an unwelcome state of affairs...For students there are many consequences. Their teachers at school and (if they go on to read English) at university may contradict one another, and too rarely seem to put the problem of differing viewpoints and frameworks for analysis in perspective; important aspects of the subject are often omitted in the confusion; and as a result many students who are otherwise more than competent have little or no idea of what they are being asked to do. The problem is how this may be remedied without losing the richness and diversity of thought which, at its best, practical criticism can foster, or, to put it another way, what are the basics? And how may they be taught?<sup>57</sup>

This extended excerpt is most interesting in that Lennard appears to have identified the crux of the problem, wherein which, the discipline (represented here in 'academic' teaching)

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<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p.63.

<sup>55</sup> De Man, *Blindness and Insight*, p.8.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> John Lennard, 1996. *The Poetry Handbook: A Guide for Reading Poetry for Pleasure and Practical Criticism*, (Oxford: OUP) p.xiii.

seems unable to cater for the ‘diversity’ of view-points in order that it can make a craft of the subtleties of a certain or particular method. But the inevitability of the impasse that I propose in this work, is to be found in Lennard’s following statement in which he states—falling directly into Hirsch’s ‘groundless’ void—that ‘the basics are an understanding of, and ability to judge, the elements of a poet’s craft.’<sup>58</sup> We may ask, why should the ‘poet’s craft’ be the measure by which the poem should be judged or assessed. This is not a criticism of Lennard’s idea of what criticism should be *per se*, just as I make no attempt to criticise the particular biases of Leavis’s or Bateson’s critical ideologies, my point rather, is that all such views and ideologies in relation to literature (and what it should be), and criticism (and what it should be) are void of a grounds by which they can be confirmed as *the* correct method. My argument is that literature is not an exact science, what is good to one critic may be bad to another. That Leavis and Bateson argue over the merits of writers. Literary traits and styles, and furthermore, propose the way literature ‘should be read’ as ‘standards’, is I think, dogmatic and exemplary of bad-faith.

To conclude I have collected my research into a theoretical model of four related assertions, which can be seen as a means of both illustrating and accounting for the existence of conflict present within in the twentieth century debate between F.R. Leavis and F.W. Bateson.

1. Condition: Leavis and Bateson decide what literature is good or bad depending on its conformity to their preconceived and implicit notions of what literary art should be. This is the inherent and unassailable condition of all evaluative criticism.
2. Implication: As a result, neither Leavis nor Bateson can assert their views of what literary criticism or approaches to literature should be, as more valid than any other statement, even those of a directly contrary nature. This is the implication of the

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<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*

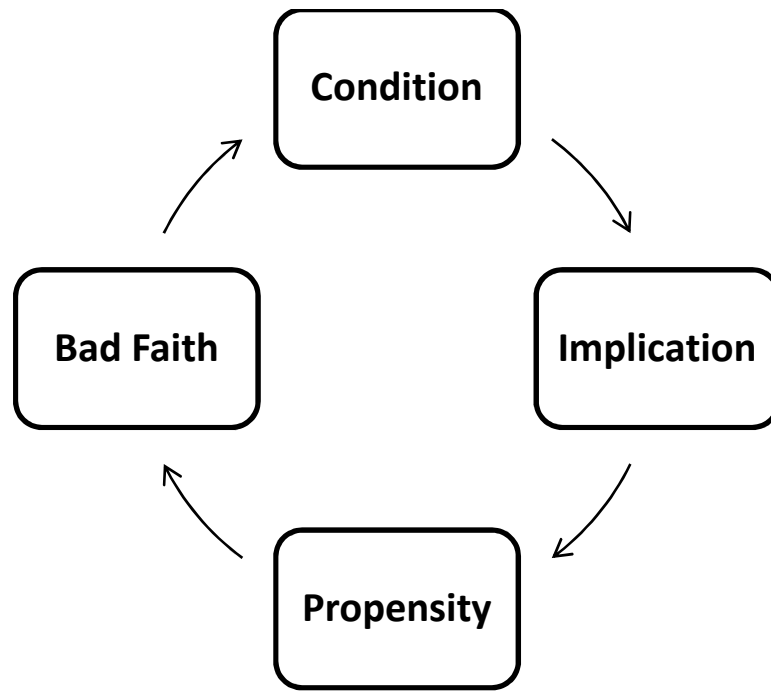


condition, whereby subjective values and tastes are not conducive to the ontical or nomothetic certitude of epistemological fields of knowledge and discipline.

3. Propensity: Despite the implication of not being able to confirm the validity of one particular approach over another, the propensity remains to believe that some literature is better than other literature, and thus that some methods of literary approach are better than others. To be aware that this belief is subjective does not in itself terminate one's belief in the validity of certain evaluative or methodological claims.
4. Bad-Faith: Because a propensity exists to promote certain literary views and values, the promotion of certain values does occur. They occur, however, in the knowledge that however strongly the values are held they are not factual in the sense that they can be proven or determined as correct. As such they occur in bad faith.

What cannot be claimed about this model is that the four stages represent neat or clear-cut distinctions from each other. In fact, it is important to emphasise the contrary, that being, that each stage emerges as a consequence of another, and therefore, the boundaries implied in a 'four-part' model are in fact less and less distinct the closer one observes. In this sense, the most accurate understanding of the model will be that which observes it as a self-perpetuating cycle of literary-critical impasse.

Figure 2. C.I.P.B.F. Model.



Literary criticism, and more broadly the study of literature, consistently emerges as antithetical to the means of being able to confirm absolute truth or confirmation of a work's artistic or aesthetic value. Though the quite catastrophically laconic Latin maxim: *De Gustibus non est Disputandum*, provides the admonition that there is no point of disputing matters of taste, few of us will be deniers to the inherency of qualitative (that is to say, expressible) values within an artistic work—hence the existence of criticism. But none of us, including Leavis or Bateson, can stand independently from the subjective perspective of the self upon the process of determining a judgment of virtue, value, and merit.

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